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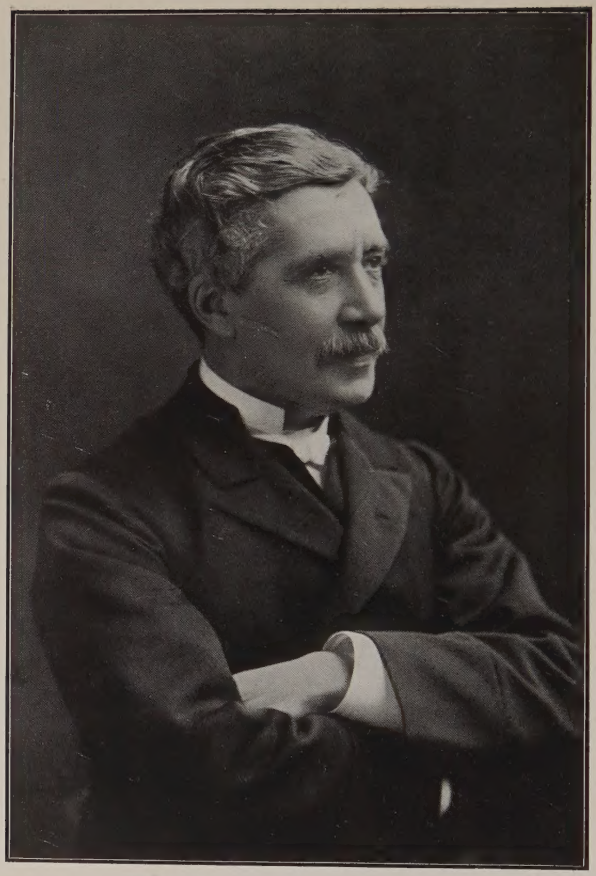

Fergus Ferguson, D.D.

FERGUS FERGUSON, D.D.

HIS THEOLOGY AND HERESY TRIAL

A CHAPTER IN SCOTTISH CHURCH HISTORY

BY

J. H. LECKIE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF
"THE WORLD TO COME AND FINAL DESTINY"
"AUTHORITY IN RELIGION" ETC.

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PREFACE.

THE importance of "the Ferguson Heresy Case" was more justly estimated at the time of its occurrence than it has been in later years. It was reported *verbatim* in leading Scottish newspapers; even the text of the libel was printed in its entirety by more than one journal. It was also the theme of many articles; it was debated at great length in "Letters to the Editor"; religious organs like the *Christian World* observed its progress with critical attention, and it was counted worthy of note even by the London *Times*! It was not ignored in the Colonies or the United States; and the great American preacher and publicist, Henry Ward Beecher, commented on its significant and momentous character. All these things indicated a widespread interest, and a perception that the issues involved were far from trivial or of merely local concern. It is to be noted, too, that the German scholar Kurtz devoted to this Case a paragraph in his *Church History*. If further evidence were required as to the attitude of

contemporary opinion it would be found in the record of the large audiences that continued day after day to follow the debates, which were always protracted and often difficult of comprehension. Finally, the entire history of the Trial reveals an intensity of conviction within the ecclesiastical Courts, especially on the part of the Prosecution, which is explicable only on the supposition that grave theological interests were believed to be at stake.

In view of these things it is remarkable that later chronicles have taken so little note of this Case. Dr. Woodside, in the *Life of Henry Calderwood, LL.D., F.R.S.E.*, and in *The Soul of a Scottish Church*, has, it is true, presented an accurate, though necessarily brief, account of the matter. But writers, for example, like the biographers of Principal Rainy and Professor W. Robertson Smith, make no reference whatever to the Ferguson Trial. This silence must be pronounced incomprehensible in view of the fact that Robertson Smith and Fergus Ferguson were tried in the same year, that they, indeed, represented two different aspects of one great transitional movement, and that their prosecutions occupied an equal space in contemporary records. No doubt the explanation of this comparative neglect of the Ferguson Case is partly that it occurred within a smaller denomination than

the Free Church, and partly that the interest of scholars, after the close of the '70's, passed, for a time, from the domain of pure Theology to that of Biblical Research.

In any event, this book is written to vindicate the position of Dr. Fergus Ferguson and his movement in the history of Scottish religious thought. No attempt is made to compare that theologian with other teachers of his time; nor are any superlative claims advanced on behalf either of an individual or of a Church. It is, indeed, asserted that the Dalkeith Case was of importance, inasmuch as it marked the first ecclesiastical discussion of eschatological problems within the Presbyterian Community: it is also claimed that, in the Controversy of 1877–1878, Dr. Ferguson challenged the entire Calvinistic statement of Christian doctrine, as it had never been publicly challenged in Scotland before, confronted it with an opposing system of his own, and secured, as the result of his contendings, a greatly extended measure of theological toleration: it is further affirmed that he was the chief instrument in inaugurating the movement for the revision of the Creed. But these are matters which are capable of proof; the evidence in support of them is adduced, and they are left to the judgment of the candid reader. We are confident that, if this narrative be considered

with reasonable care, it will be admitted that Dr. Ferguson achieved a notable work, and that he is worthy of an honourable place among the reformers and thinkers of the Scottish Church. It is believed, also, that the story here set forth will be found to possess an interest human as well as ecclesiastical, and that the career depicted in these pages, in its idealism and devotion, will be recognised as belonging to the order of lovely and noble things.

It need hardly be said that the present writer is alone responsible for all expositions, statements, and criticisms contained in this book. He received from Dr. Ferguson no private information as to the history of the Case, and no explanations of his theological system, beyond those quoted in the text. Dr. Ferguson never, indeed, referred to the events of his Prosecution except in the most casual way, nor did he express any opinion as to the conduct of individuals in the matter.

It may be well, further, to explain that it has not been found possible to find a title for this volume that entirely describes its content. The one which has been chosen does not, for instance, indicate that the Dalkeith Case was really a prosecution ; so that Fergus Ferguson was, in fact though not in form, *twice* on trial for heresy. Also, the book has a somewhat wider reach than is indicated by the title, for, in the first

chapter, an endeavour is made to connect Dr. Ferguson's work with that of his predecessors in the movement of revolt against the Westminster Confession of Faith. It may be added that a detailed exposition of his theological system is given in the fourth chapter, in order that the narrative may not be encumbered with constant references to that system, and in order also that those who are not interested in dogmatic divinity may be enabled to omit this statement without being debarred from an understanding of the story which I have to tell.

The basis of this study is contained in printed reports of proceedings. The writer has examined carefully all the speeches delivered in the course of the Dalkeith and Glasgow Cases, as well as other available and relevant documents. Although, therefore, this book contains few references (it is, indeed, useless to refer to newspaper files) the reader may rely on the accuracy of quotations and statements of fact. The accounts of the Row Heresy Case and of Irving's Trial are also founded on the original records. Other writings consulted are referred to in the notes. I am indebted to Sir William Robertson Nicoll, C.H., D.D., LL.D., for permission to make use of articles on *John MacLeod Campbell* and on *The Ferguson Heresy Case*, contributed by me to the *Expositor*; to the late Sir William

Lorimer, LL.D., and to the Rev. Charles Jerdan, LL.B., D.D., for access to their valuable collection of Reports in both of the Ferguson Heresy Cases; to the Session of Queen's Park Church for extracts from its Minutes; and to Dr. Ferguson's sons, Dr. Joshua Ferguson and the Rev. James Ferguson, B.D., for important information as to their father's career. I am obliged also to the Rev. J. T. Dean, D.D., for his careful examination of Chapter IV., and to Sir John M. Clark, Bt., for not a few suggestions.

The Rev. W. H. Macfarlane and the Rev. D. H. Lawrence, D.D., have helped me more than I can tell by their constant sympathy, and by the unwearied labour with which they have revised the manuscript and corrected the proofs. They have also given me invaluable counsel and criticism. They have rendered this service the more effectively in that they, like Dr. Dean, share with me a profound and unchanging veneration for the memory of Fergus Ferguson.

J. H. L.

EDINBURGH, *April* 1923.

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BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE.

This volume is not a biography, but the following statement of the main facts and dates in Dr. Ferguson's career are set down for the guidance of the reader. Such amplifications of this outline as may be required will be introduced throughout the narrative.

The Rev. Fergus Ferguson, D.D., was of Highland descent, but he was born at Glasgow on 19*th August* 1832. *In his youth he entered upon a commercial career, but soon abandoned it and devoted himself to the ministry of the United Presbyterian Church.*

He was educated at Glasgow University, where he was a distinguished student; and at the Divinity Hall of his own denomination; and he was ordained as pastor of Buccleuch Street Church, Dalkeith, in 1864.

In 1871 *he was accused of heresy on account of his teaching as to the doctrine of the Intermediate State. In the same year he published a volume of Sermons, of which three editions were issued.*

In 1875 *he became pastor of Queen's Park Church, Glasgow, where he soon established a powerful and devoted congregation.*

Early in 1877 *he began a movement for the Revision of the Creed, and the years* 1877–1878 *witnessed the great ecclesiastical Prosecution which is the proper subject of this book.*

He received his Doctorate from his own University in 1885. *In* 1891 *he refused nomination to a theological chair; and in that year also he made his last public appearance in the Synod, when he opposed the policy of the Disestablishment Committee.*

In 1905 *he retired to West Kilbride, where he died on* 16*th October* 1911.

CHAPTER I.

(INTRODUCTORY.)

EARLIER SCOTTISH HERESY CASES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

From time to time in the history of mankind there occur periods marked by an intense vitality which reveals itself in many signs and wonders; in new unfoldings of thought, in political change, in artistic and literary fruitfulness, in religious revivals of diverse kinds, and especially perhaps in the production of great personalities who embody and represent with the utmost individual distinction the manifold powers of the human mind and spirit. Such a period was the nineteenth century. Not even the treasured time of great Elizabeth, not even the era of the Renascence or of the Reformation, was more lavish in the variety of its fruits or more prodigal in its display of power than the epoch which witnessed the development of industrialism and democracy, of the evolutionary theory in science, of the Idealistic philosophy, of the

literature which had for its first and most splendid products the works of Goethe, Scott, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Keats. Moreover, the age which fulfilled itself in so many distinct forms and modes of expression possessed a corresponding wealth of illustrious men: warriors, statesmen, reformers, and masters of thought. In contemplating the history of the hundred years which began with the French Revolution we feel in an atmosphere as of some wonderful summer season wherein nature seems, in lavish mood, to revel in the joy of multiform creation.

It may perhaps be said of that memorable time that its achievements in the purely spiritual sphere were the least of its glories, that it accomplished no marvels of change or discovery in religious belief comparable to the revolutions it wrought in politics and science; that it produced no master-works of theology worthy to be ranked with the best expressions of its poetic and imaginative genius, nor any leaders of the Christian Churches or of Christian thought equal in stature and power to the great captains of statesmanship, war, and industry. But whatever may justly be asserted in this doubtful vein of mere comparison, it is beyond dispute that in religious matters, as in other departments of human affairs, the nineteenth century was an age of vivid activity, of battle and change, of adventure and conquest, of varied, beneficent fruitfulness. During that time the modern pulpit attained the summit of its power; the foreign missionary enterprise

had its most illustrious apostles and lived its most arduous days; the science of Biblical criticism compassed its quickening work; great movements were carried to completion; the thoughts of believing men were liberated and enlarged; the entire atmosphere of ecclesiastical life was renewed; and minds of varied endowment developed the conceptions, and pondered to fruitful ends the difficult problems, of faith.

In all the crowding activities of the nineteenth century there can be no doubt that Scotsmen had an honourable share. In politics, in commerce, in engineering, in medicine and surgery, in natural science, and in literature their achievements are known to all the world. It is somewhat difficult, however, to determine the precise value of Scotland's contribution to the religious thought and progress of the age. In the realm of sacred letters that country has never displayed a very adventurous spirit, or a very abundant creative power. The light it has shed on spiritual problems through the writings of its divines has been largely a reflected light, and its lamps have been fed with alien oil. At the Reformation it derived both its ecclesiastical polity and its doctrine from abroad, and during a long period thereafter it produced not a single work of religious science which can be called a classic. The Confession of Faith itself was chiefly composed by Englishmen. It would almost be fair to say that the little northern kingdom has never really had a theology of her own;

that her Church has, in matters of faith, been a craft without an engine, perpetually in tow behind some greater foreign ship, French, Dutch, German, English. Writing in the year 1850, Döllinger noted with astonishment this literary sterility of the Scottish genius, ascribing it to the dominance of a Calvinistic creed. It is to be observed, however, that during the latter half of the nineteenth century this reproach was largely taken away; for MacLeod Campbell's *Nature of the Atonement* is one of the most original and profound works of the Christian mind, and Campbell was the first of a group of men, belonging to all the Presbyterian Churches, whose writings cannot fairly be described as only echoes of foreign learning or the mere elaborations of an imported creed.

Leaving aside, however, the question of literary productiveness, and turning to the region where theological and ecclesiastical interests meet and are involved, we find that the Scottish Kirk, during the period under review, passed through a long crisis of revolt against her traditional Creed, and was the scene of battles which had results far beyond her own borders. It is a marvel that this crisis was postponed to so late an hour; indeed, the long-continued faithfulness of our Presbyterianism to the Westminster Confession of Faith is a difficult thing to understand. It is doubtful whether that Confession ever represented the true convictions of the majority of Scotsmen. There were always multitudes of the laity and many of the clergy whose knowledge of

it was small and their agreement with it even less than their knowledge. The national mind is not peculiarly prone to unquestioning belief. There is, rather, a strong element in it which is truly represented by the genius of David Hume: subtle, negative, sceptical. And Thomas Carlyle was in nothing more characteristically Scottish than in the passionate audacity which rendered his writings one of the most disturbing and disintegrating spiritual forces of his age. Yet the Westminster Creed, so provocative of criticism, exercised a formal authority over the Kirk which remained unchallenged for generations by any ecclesiastical party. Men like Principal Robertson and Walter Scott,[1] and the acutest minds of the Scottish Bench and Bar, and all the crowd of the Scottish ministry, seem to have been able to sign it without the slightest thought or care. That these had all read it is doubtful; that they all believed it, incredible. Why, then, did it remain unquestioned during so long a time? Mainly, because it really represented the beliefs of a fervent and forceful minority; but in some degree because it had become a kind of national institution; in a measure, too, because it was an element in that compact between Church and State on which the Presbyterian Establishment rested; partly, also, because many educated people regarded it as a purely historical document, not to be interpreted in a literal way, and

[1] Scott was at one time a Presbyterian elder; and so must have accepted the Confession.

not, after all, more objectionable than any document which might be likely to take its place.

Such, then, were the forces which throughout many years secured the reign of the Westminster Confession within the National Church. But chief among these, as already suggested, was the hearty adhesion which that Symbol commanded among the Calvinistic evangelicals. These were always a minority of the population ; but they possessed the fervour and strength of conviction which enable a small number of men to hold in subjection a facile host of conforming Laodiceans. This was the strength of the Confessional position, but it was, at the same time, a potential source of weakness. So long as the most intensely religious people within the Church were satisfied with the formulated Calvinism of the Creed its authority was secure ; but it is evident that this security was certain to have an end if ever these people should come to have among them men of ability who were not in accord with the Puritan theology. A rule that has for long been supported by religious conviction must begin to be shaken as soon as religious conviction becomes its foe.

And this was precisely the thing that took place in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. The Idealistic philosophy of the time, with the humanitarian and romantic impulses that accompanied it, produced a state of mind which found the Calvinistic formulæ nadequate to its needs. The same spiritual forces which informed the literature of the new era, and

inspired vast political movements, expanded the thought of religious men, compelled them to see in a broader light the questions of faith, and gave to their conceptions of human life a tenderness and width of sympathy which found itself thwarted and offended by the narrower and harder notions of an earlier age. Hence arose that revolt against the Confession which, with fluctuating fortunes, through many personal sacrifices, and amid much ecclesiastical turmoil, lasted throughout the century, and has even yet to fight its decisive battle.

I.

The earliest protagonist of this movement, within the Kirk, was John MacLeod Campbell. This illustrious thinker was born in the year 1800; was deposed from the ministry of the Scottish Church in 1831; opened, thereafter, a chapel in Glasgow where he laboured for twenty-five years; published his book on the Atonement in 1856; left Glasgow in 1868, and retired to the parish of Row, where he had ministered before his deposition; died there in 1872. His father, Dr. Campbell of Kilninver, belonged to the Moderate party in the Kirk, and seems to have possessed most of the virtues and few of the defects of his school. His theology was perhaps a little vague, for he owned Tillotson and Clarke as his masters, and his preaching was concerned with matters of Christian conduct and of the devotional life rather than with dogma. But

his piety was deep and fervent, his literary culture generous, his spirit catholic; and his home was the habitation of gentle charities and affections. Such a father as this secured of necessity the love and reverence of his children; and his relations with his son John were, throughout life, of an almost ideal beauty. The son, of course, travelled a long way from the paternal traditions; and he sounded depths of thought that were beyond the ken of the older man. But no cloud ever shadowed the light of mutual love and sympathy in which they walked until the end; and John MacLeod Campbell testified, when he was himself in the evening of life, that his experience of his earthly father had made real to him in youth the Fatherhood of God. Let all this be remembered by those who would form a fair conception of the Scottish Moderates.

But it is not only or mainly for its human interest that one dwells on these circumstances of Campbell's birth and nurture; for they have great historical importance. If this man had been reared in the traditions of the Evangelical party his career would have been entirely different. He would not have been exposed in youth to anti-Calvinistic influences; he would have been involved in ecclesiastical activities; he would probably have become an exponent of the theology represented by Chalmers, whom he would have followed into the Free Church. And if these things had happened he might indeed have lived a

useful, beneficent life and attained a position of dignity and power; but he would not have been a liberator of religious thought, his name would not be ranked to-day among those of our mighty teachers, he would not have written *The Nature of the Atonement.* To the circumstances of his parentage and his education he owed the seeds of that harvest whose first-fruits were for him persecution, loneliness, and battle; whose after-fruits were a victorious loveliness of character, a supreme achievement of thought, and an imperishable name.

On the other hand, it must be said that there was never much of the Moderate discernible in Campbell. He began his ministerial charge of the parish of Row as a fervent young Evangelist; a spiritual Cavalier aglow with the zeal of salvation, ready to destroy by swift assault the forces of evil. Nor were there any signs of heresy in the teaching of his first days; indeed, we look in vain for any traces in that teaching of his early training. He entered the service of the Church, apparently, with no consciousness of theological differences from his fellows. "The fact of an Atonement," he says, "and the necessity of regeneration were the only points which had any decided prominence in my mind." [1] So far as he himself knew, his beliefs were then simply those of all earnest young clergymen; and he devoted himself zealously to his vocation, especially in the matter of pastoral dealings with his

[1] *Reminiscences*, p. 11.

parishioners as to the concerns of the soul, being resolved always "to see his people in the light of the Divine Love." Yet, within an amazingly short time he had contrived to arouse theological suspicion in the sensitive minds of the neighbouring clergy; "heretics" like Erskine of Linlathen discerned in him a kindred spirit; rumours of his wild speculations spread throughout the country; and the watch-dogs of orthodoxy began to growl at the sound of his name. Finally, after long controversy, he was, in the year 1830, libelled by the Presbytery of Dumbarton, on the complaint of twelve parishioners, the charge being that he taught the doctrines of Universal Atonement and Pardon, as well as of Assurance of Faith.

MacLeod Campbell did not deny that he held and had preached these tenets; and it is interesting to note the account he gave of the origin of his views. He claimed that he had been influenced, not by speculative necessities, but by the constraint of practical experience. He had found his parishioners at Row in a state of great spiritual apathy, and had perceived that what they needed for their awakening was a confident belief that the redeeming love of God in Christ really extended to them. How could they attain such a belief except by the assurance of faith shining in their hearts? And how could this light be kindled within them unless their pastor were able to declare that the benefits of Christ's redeeming sacrifice were the heritage of every man? Possessed by these convictions he had gradually come

to proclaim the Gospel of universal Pardon and Atonement. "Believe in the forgiveness of sins, because you *are* forgiven." "Believe that Christ died for *you*, because He died for all mankind." "The Cross of Christ is to be seen as the unveiling of God's heart in its movement toward every human being, continually, without ceasing day or night; whether we pray or whether we withhold prayer; whether we seek His face or whether we turn from it: this is the heart of God." [1]

Such is Campbell's account of the pathway which led him to "heresy"; and there can be no doubt of his absolute honesty in the matter. We may conjecture, nevertheless, that speculative influences had more to do with the case than he himself knew. He had shown great metaphysical gifts as a student; and he tells us incidentally that discussions with Unitarian comrades in University days had disposed him to regard many important beliefs as open questions. As we have seen, also, his father, whose masters in theology were Tillotson and Samuel Clarke, exercised an important influence in the evolution of his beliefs. The subsequent history of Campbell's thought, too, suggests that something more profound than the requirements of pastoral work lay at the root of his theological growth; indeed, the sway of the Idealist philosophy is evident in his great work. His mind was, in effect, a chosen organ of the vast and mysterious spiritual impulse

[1] *Reminiscences*, p. 27; *Responsibility for Gift of Eternal Life*, p. 108.

which at that time was stirring in all lands, and producing everywhere wonderful fruits in literature, art, politics, philosophy and religion.

But, whatever the origin of Campbell's new beliefs may have been, he embraced them with fervour, and held them with a confidence that was as an inward flame of warm unflickering light. A tone of extreme assurance pervades all his early sermons. At the end of his Row ministry he said: "These things are spoken to you with as much confidence as they ever could have been given out at any time by any creature." "I have uttered not a word that is not to the glory of God."[1] And this accent of dogmatic conviction is found in his private as well as his public utterances. Indeed, it is difficult to restrain a smile as one reads his letters written at this period. His own views are always referred to as "the truth" and "the gospel"; and those who do not receive them are regarded as the unconscious enemies of "the light." We hear of conferences with ministers in Glasgow; and, from his account of these, it is quite evident that he never contemplated the idea of his being convinced, or even influenced, by those who opposed him in argument. He went to Edinburgh once to confer with Chalmers and Irving about his doctrine of Assurance; and Mrs. Oliphant describes him as having gone "to seek counsel." But in one of his epistles he repudiates this notion, and indicates that he went with the sole purpose of con-

[1] *Row Heresy*, pp. 440, 465.

vincing Irving and Chalmers. "I did *not* go to consult them. . . . I went in the hope that the grounds of my own convictions would commend themselves to them." [1] Similarly, in his speech before the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, he said: "A decision of my Presbytery against me gives to the enemy of the souls of my people an advantage in resisting the truth of what I preach." [2] This seems to be a suggestion that the Presbytery had, unwittingly no doubt, allied themselves with evil powers; and Presbyteries do not like suggestions of that kind. It is plain, indeed, that Campbell had all along displayed in his relations with his opponents a certain want of sense, especially the sense of humour. Dr. Graham, in defending the Presbyterial action, complained to the Synod: "In his conversations with us he maintained his principles zealously and perseveringly." Further, Dr. Graham related how his brethren had assured Campbell that if he would only refrain from teaching his peculiar doctrines in their churches, they on their part would refrain from noticing what he might say to his own people. But the young reformer had refused these terms, with the result that they had been obliged in self-defence to exclude him from their pulpits. "He was not merely dogmatical but dictatorial, declaring that he would preach whatever the Spirit dictated to him." All this was distinctly trying to men very much his seniors in the ministry,

[1] *Memorials of John MacLeod Campbell*, i. 52.
[2] *Whole Proceedings in Case of John MacLeod Campbell*, p. 233.

and not themselves perhaps of the prophetic type ; and it partly explains the course of events. It is probable that if Campbell had not been quite so aggressive, and had displayed a little more patience and docility, there would never have been a "Row Heresy Case." But then, neither would there have been his book on the Atonement.

It is to be noted, of course, that Campbell's doctrine of Redemption was, at this time, very far from being the impressive structure it afterwards became. It was not until twenty-five years after his deposition that he made known that theory of the Saviour's work by which he is so widely known. That later theory had for its essential affirmations that the only condition necessary to the forgiveness of sin was complete confession, repentance, and obedience on the part of the sinner ; and that this perfect propitiation, unachievable by mortals, had been accomplished by Christ who was the incarnation of the Ideal Humanity, which was itself identical with the eternal Son of God. This was the teaching which Campbell presented to the world in 1856 ; with many elaborations and profound piritual analyses. But in 1831 all this was as yet undeveloped ; the Row theology went no further than to repudiate the limitations of Calvinism and to assert the Universality of Redemption, and the Assurance of Faith.

It is interesting to recall his explanations of the doctrines which he then held, as these were stated by

him in his defence before the Presbytery. In saying that the atoning work of Christ was of universal import, he did not mean to assert that it actually saved every man, but only that it made salvation possible for every man. When he spoke of universal pardon, also, he intended to teach no more than that the barriers which prevented free return to God had been removed in the case of all men without exception. As to Assurance of Faith, he did not maintain, as had been alleged, that all Christians enjoyed an unbroken consciousness of well-being and peace; but he did maintain that a saving trust in God involved, of its very nature, a glad confidence on the part of the saved that they were in fact reconciled to the Father, and were entirely secure of future blessedness. This confidence might, indeed, suffer periods of eclipse; and such times of darkness did not imply for believers the loss of status as redeemed children of God. They were, however, of the nature of sin, inasmuch as they were not of the nature of faith.[1]

It must be admitted that these positions are not very impressive. The mind of Campbell required to work slowly in order to work exactly; and his opinions had, so far, been formed quickly and under pressure of circumstance. His use of the word "pardon" to express what was not really pardon at all was unfortunate; and there was little meaning in his speaking of a "universal atonement," which in so far as it was

[1] *Whole Proceedings*, pp. 15–50.

universal was futile; for he admits that at this time he held a modified Calvinism, and one of his own witnesses affirmed his teaching to have been that "only the chosen could come to God." [1] There can, indeed, be no question that his thinking at this stage was confused and contradictory. If anyone is in doubt as to this, let him study the discourses preached towards the end of the Row period, and printed from shorthand notes. The "early sermons" published after Campbell's death had been carefully revised and betray the influence of his later thought; but the report of his actual words, taken down at the moment, shows his teaching as, in 1830, it really was. And it is far from commending itself to the candid reader. No doubt, these sermons are sincere, passionate, evangelic; and they contain the promise of things to come. But they are full of repetition, and their theology is crude. They assert over and over again that universal atonement and pardon have been achieved through "the blood" and "the death" of Christ; but the references to the Atonement are vaguely worded, and convey as a rule no distinct idea. The most definite statement is: "The blood of Christ took away our sins, and He from whom the offering was accepted received gifts, even the Holy Ghost and the right to reign, for the men for whom He shed His blood." And this seems to imply that a price was paid by Christ, in return for which we receive redemption. Also, an extreme

[1] *Reminiscences*, p. 154; *Whole Proceedings*, p. 151.

doctrine of total depravity is taught: "There is nothing good in you . . . nothing in any feature of the natural man which forms any exception to the sweeping condemnation of God." "You do naturally hate God and one another." "God have mercy on you, for I see a red cup of the wrath of God mixed for you, and except ye repent ye shall all drink it to the dregs."[1] Thus, it is declared, on the one hand, that every man has been pardoned and his sin removed by Christ. On the other hand, sin is said to remain as a black cloud between men and the Father, so that they are still the object of His wrath and, although members of a redeemed humanity, have in them no good thing and are under a sentence of everlasting damnation. In short, the Row teaching seems to have been an ill-considered combination of extreme orthodoxy with certain incongruous elements which were clearly grasped by the preacher as certainties of personal faith, but not yet *possessed* by him as part of a system of thought.

The weakness which was thus inherent in Campbell's structure of doctrine became evident as soon as it was put to the test of criticism. Throughout his trial he appeared, what he was, a young man conscious of a message which he could not as yet formulate. He was certainly no match, in stated argument, for the expert doctors who confronted him. They knew every subtlety of scholastic Calvinism, and they drew minute

[1] *Row Heresy*, pp. 178, 428, 429, 412.

and bewildering distinctions with "the easy precision of lifelong practice." It was easy indeed for them to pierce him with logical thrusts; and especially easy to prove that his Doctrine of Assurance was either a commonplace or else was inconsistent with the Confession of Faith. Unfortunately, they showed no magnanimity, no consideration, no desire to get at the real thoughts of a fervent and patently honest young apostle. They displayed, instead, a spirit rancorous and ruthless; and they surrounded the whole proceedings with an atmosphere like that of a petty parochial court. Campbell's character was attacked, his motives distorted, his doctrine caricatured. The bitterness with which he was pursued throughout the entire case is indeed inexplicable. His enemies were not even content with his deposition; for the Presbytery of Lorne, after that event, demanded, though in vain, that Dr. Campbell should read from his pulpit at Kilninver a condemnation and gross travesty of the views held by his beloved son, and should also excommunicate any of his own people who might go to hear the outcast preach.[1]

Still, it remains true that the defence of Campbell when on trial was not a strong one. It is worthy of study chiefly as showing the point from which a great man started on his theological pilgrimage, and also as embodying the first determined revolt against the Confessional theology. It is evident that to assert

[1] *Memorials*, i. 102.

the universality of the Atonement, while retaining the accepted view of its nature, was a hopeless enterprise. If the sufferings of Christ equalled the penalty due from all men, while yet they were destined to achieve release from that penalty in the case only of some, it follows that the price of sin, as respects those finally lost, will in the end have been paid twice over, first by the Saviour and then by the sinners. Campbell himself soon recognised this; and he proceeded then to that radical inquiry into the character of our Lord's redemptive work which issued in the framing of his great constructive theory.

When the trial began, some of Campbell's friends, including Thomas Erskine, hoped that he would be triumphant. But they were soon undeceived. The general sense of ecclesiastical Scotland was against him; his clerical brethren were mostly hostile—only a few, like Story of Rosneath, giving him whole-hearted support; he did not himself offer a very effective *apologia*, and he made the tactical mistake of claiming that his doctrine was not contrary to the Confession, and yet attacking that Confession in words of passionate repudiation. Also, he was without the aid of any leading ecclesiastic or professor; for, although Chalmers expressed the hope that he would "be got through," he did nothing to secure that this hope should be realised. And the result was that when Campbell had been condemned by the Presbytery, and his case remitted by the Synod to the Assembly, he had no

expectation of escape from being deposed. On the eve of the Assembly he wrote to his father bidding him look for no vindication of his son by an earthly court, but expressing a humble confidence that he would be justified before the Bar of Christ.

In point of fact, no one in the Assembly even proposed that Campbell should be acquitted. Any who might have favoured such a course were parties in the case. Besides, the defender practically restated the doctrines for which he was libelled, and took also very high ground as to the right possessed by every Christian minister of teaching what he held to be true. The Assembly had really nothing to decide, therefore, except the question of Campbell's fidelity to the Standards; and no one was ready to assert that he was in fact faithful to the Confession. This being so, the only issue left for decision was the degree of punishment to be inflicted. Nor can it be said that the Venerable Court showed any strong desire to impose the extreme penalty. This was shown by the small number of members who took part in the final vote—only 125 out of more than 300. It was proved also by the motion submitted by Dr. Cook, leader of the Moderates and of the House. Dr. Cook, indeed, remarked that the defender must himself be convinced by this time that he was not in harmony with the Confession; he also said that to grant the liberty that had been claimed would "make an end of the Church of Scotland"; but he declared that a sentence of suspension from the

ministerial office would satisfy him. He added, however, that he was willing to go further if the Assembly so desired. It was the Evangelical party that was mainly responsible for the supreme blunder and cruel wrong of utterly casting out of the Church one of the best men she has ever had. For, an Evangelical leader, Lord Moncreiff, was foremost among those who insisted on the decree of deposition: a decree which was carried with only six dissentients. Thus was justified the forewarning of Chalmers to Campbell: "The Moderation is not half so excited against you as the Evangelicals." [1]

The intensity of feeling which attended the close of this trial was evidenced by a curious confusion of speech on the part of the chief Clerk of Assembly. That gentleman meant to declare that the Church of Scotland would flourish long after the opinions of Campbell had passed from memory. But what he really said, in his agitation, was: "These doctrines of Mr. Campbell will remain and flourish long after the Church of Scotland has perished and been forgotten." Thomas Erskine, who was present and noted this, whispered to those behind him: "This he spake, not of himself, but being High Priest—he prophesied." [2] Words of a different and of a moving kind were heard when the venerable Dr. Campbell of Kilninver closed a short and broken speech with the saying: "Moderator, I am not afraid for my son. Though his brethren

[1] *Whole Proceedings*, pp. 169–174.
[2] *Letters of Thomas Erskine*, p. 106.

cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him. And while I live I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and blameless a son." [1] This pathetic tribute was well deserved, as was shown by the conduct of Campbell after his expulsion. When he returned to Row he, of course, found his pulpit closed against him. And so he delivered his farewell message to his parish in the open fields one bright summer morning under a clear and quiet sky. We cannot doubt that his heart was sad that day; for the structure of life lay in ruins around him. Yet he uttered not one word of bitterness, and was content to deliver a purely religious message. Also, when his successor was about to be ordained he spoke again to his people and besought for the newcomer the same welcome as had cheered himself when first he had come among them.[2] Truly, "he nothing common did or mean."

It seems that Dr. Cook had warrant for his claim that the proceedings in the case must have convinced Mr. Campbell that he was in fact at variance with the Standards of the Church. Indeed, he confessed as much to his friend, A. J. Scott, as they walked away together from the Assembly that had expelled them both. Scott's statement is memorable: "After the dreary night in the Assembly, the dawn breaking on us as we returned, alike condemned, to our lodgings in

[1] *Whole Proceedings*, pp. 174–177.
[2] *Reminiscences*, p. 40.

the new town of Edinburgh, I turned round and looked on my companion's face under the pale light and asked him, 'Could you sign the Confession now?' His answer was, 'No; the Assembly was right. Our doctrine and the Confession are incompatible.'" [1]

The greater number of those who figured in the "Row Heresy Case" are to us mere shadows now, or voices thin and far away. Some, indeed, of the actors in that drama appear to us with greater vividness than their fellows. There is, for instance, the Rev. Dr. Hamilton, enemy of Campbell, a doughty fighter, sturdily waging trivial war. There is Campbell of Kilninver, in whom his son discerned the ideal fatherhood. There is Story of Rosneath, type of the loyal friend. There is the Advocate for the defence, Mr. Carlyle, an able man but too eloquent; later an Irvingite; prone to emotion. He ended a published letter to Hamilton thus: "I entreat you to repent." There is also Dr. Cook, a capable leader, courteous and logical, embarrassed by policy. In the background is the figure of Chalmers, enigmatic and silent; and Thomas Erskine, benign, ironic. But more clearly to be discerned than any separate figures are the two great parties; more plainly to be felt than any individual influence is the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the time, electric, tense, and ominous. Without are the Seceders, vigilant and hostile; within the Church are Moderates and Evangelicals, gathering their forces for the great

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine*, p. 106.

campaign that ended in 1843, each on guard against the other, each unwilling to yield the enemy a point. Dominating all is the great religious public of Scotland anxious for the interests of law and order alike in Church and State, and impatient of individual revolts that menaced the structure of authority.

At such a moment, in such an atmosphere, in the presence of forces like these, the cause of Campbell was predestined to disaster. Ecclesiastical leaders, fighting men, and partisans are seldom gifted with the wisdom that is able to discern the larger issues of things ; and the officials of 1831 acted after their kind. Moderates forgot that there is a justice higher than expediency and a liberty that is better than peace. Evangelicals failed to recognise a brother in the fervent young Evangelist who stood at the Bar, faulty in logic but splendid in vision. Both parties alike, concerned with immediate interests and bewildered by logical dilemmas, were blind to the folly of a decision which in effect declared that no one who believed that Christ had died for all men was fit to be a minister of the Scottish Church. And so, both parties combined to banish a man who was yet to prove himself one of the great gifts of God to the Church Universal ; combined, also, to drive into the desert a loyal son of the Scottish Establishment, in whose eyes " dissent was schism and schism was sin." Yet, for once, the wrath of man did work the righteousness of God ; for an ecclesiastical decision, that was born in strife and completed in

blindness, was to have this for its effect, that a prophet was given the freedom and space that he needed for the slow perfecting of his thought, and for the fulfilment of the work that had been given him to do.

II.

It has been for many good reasons that we have thus devoted considerable space to this account of the "Row Heresy Trial." For one thing, the debate in that prosecution involved the most important of the questions which later "heretics" sought to solve; so that the Case is typical and representative. In the second place, the central figure in it is one of the great spiritual masters of the modern time. Moreover, it was the opening conflict in a long struggle; it began the nineteenth-century movements of revolt against the Confession. Further, the issue of this trial had consequences of the utmost moment; it quickened the theological spirit of the age by the discussion it provoked, it enabled Campbell to think out his position free of ecclesiastical restraint, and it tended to secure for later thinkers a wider toleration. It is true that the Church of Scotland was not so ready as it should have been to recognise the error of which it had been guilty in dismissing this man from its ministry; for, in 1841, the same party which had been responsible for that act of bitter folly decreed the deposition of one who had done no more than expound in certain popular devotional books a

somewhat gentle and undogmatic type of thought. This clergyman, Mr. Wright of Borthwick, repudiated all the tenets of which he was accused, but was none the less condemned to the fate that is reserved for great offenders. This deplorable deed of partisan passion was, however, the last of its kind for many years within the National Establishment, and the next generation showed that it at least had learned the lesson of 1831.[1]

But the mention of 1831 reminds us that the Church of Scotland has reason to associate that year with many unhappy memories. For the Assembly which decided the Row Case took also his licence from A. J. Scott, afterwards Principal of Owen's College, Manchester; it supplied, moreover, other proofs of undue theological zeal, and, especially, it really determined the fate of Edward Irving. The fortunes of that tragic figure were indeed related to those of Campbell in many respects. Thus, the strange phenomena of supernatural revelations, miraculous cures, and general spiritual excitement which appeared in the Gareloch district and gave a harmful bent to the mind of Irving were attributed by many to the sensation caused by the evangelism of the Row minister. Also, the great London preacher and the apostle of universal Atonement and Pardon were attached friends. Finally, as we have indicated, the same Assembly which deposed Campbell condemned the writings of Irving, and instructed the Presbytery of Annan to proceed against

[1] Cf. Cunningham's *Church History of Scotland*, vol. ii. pp. 506–507.

him if at any time he should come within its jurisdiction or claim the standing of a Scottish minister.

These considerations, however, although they seem to establish an intimate connection between the case of Campbell and that of Irving, lose much of their significance as soon as we submit them to a close examination. It is evident, for instance, that the friendship which existed between these two men involved no real community of belief. There is, further, no demonstrable relation, such as is suggested by certain writers, between the preaching of Campbell and the neurotic disturbances, the faith-healings, and the prophesyings in unknown tongues, which occurred in his neighbourhood. It is true that Campbell was for a time interested in these manifestations; but they made no permanent impression on his mind and had no influence on his theology. He also dissented from the later developments of Irving's work, and would have no part in his Catholic Apostolic Church. Indeed, it is hardly possible to conceive two men more dissimilar in intellectual type than Campbell and Irving. The one was a contemplative mystic, seeking for truth along the unfrequented paths of the spiritual life, among the serene but difficult heights of eternal faith and vision; the other was a man of objective mind, who thought in concrete forms, whose chief endowments were an unrestrained though resplendent imagination, a magnificent oratorical gift, and a generous simplicity of purpose. To Campbell, ritualistic forms, sensuous splendours of symbolism,

and the orderly setting forth of ecclesiastical authority were matters of small concern, but to Irving these were of vital moment. While, therefore, these two faithful friends both belonged to the company of the saints and were peers in the qualities of spiritual manhood, they were yet separated by radical differences of temper and outlook which were exhibited in their works and in the fruits which followed them. The theologian of the Atonement completed a long life of hard toil, indeed, but of quietness and brooding meditation; and his influence lives on as a perpetual source of fertilising power in the deeper thought of the Church. But the London apostle spent himself in fiery propaganda, lived in a world of millenarian hopes, hearing mystical voices, dreaming fantastic dreams; and died untimely, leaving behind him a vague but splendid memory, and having for his visible monument that picturesque and honourable though perhaps somewhat visionary institution, the Catholic Apostolic Church.

If, then, we keep in view these facts and considerations, we are not surprised to find that the Irving Heresy Case is of little theological importance compared with the trial that ended with Campbell's deprivation. Irving's heresy was, indeed, largely a matter of terminology, and displays no considerable powers of thought. It consists mainly in the doctrine that our Lord took upon Himself our humanity in all its liability to sin, though He was Himself sinless. In a letter to Chalmers he says: "My doctrine on our Lord's human

nature is as literally the doctrine of the Confessions of the Church as can be—namely, That He took the human nature of the Virgin, that it was thoroughly and completely sanctified in the generation by the work of the Holy Ghost, and underwent no process or progress of sanctification." [1] This seems harmless teaching; but unfortunately it was often expressed with great and dangerous looseness, and it led to a controversy which surrounded with an atmosphere of irreverent and distasteful questioning the sacred mystery of the Saviour's incarnation.

It was chiefly, no doubt, on account of this alleged heresy that Irving was deposed from the ministry by the Presbytery of Annan in 1833, but this was not the chief cause of his being dismissed from the pastorate of Regent Square Church by the Presbytery of London in the preceding year. The truth was that the Scottish Community in that city grew weary of tolerating the state of things which prevailed in Irving's congregation, during the later years of his ministry. He had indoctrinated a number of his people with that belief in the supernatural gift of speaking with tongues which he had himself adopted as the result of the Gareloch manifestations; and the consequences of this were in some respects deplorable. For instance, he became liable to be interrupted in the conduct of public worship by the arbitrary interventions of persons who believed themselves to be possessed by the Spirit. The habit

[1] Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving*, p. 292.

of these "prophets" was to arise in their places in the church and to pour forth upon the startled congregation a flood of words which were, partly, without ascertainable meaning, and, partly, possessed of significance but not of enlightenment. Such outpourings Irving regarded as a message from the Most High, and listened to them accordingly with a reverent submission. But the result was that the service of the sanctuary became often a chaos of excitement and fear. Nor was any "revelation" received which might atone for such disorder. For the prophesyings began in an unknown tongue, and although they commonly ended in English, this latter portion of the prophecy bore no trace whatever of fresh inspiration, and was remarkable only for its general agreement with Mr. Irving's teaching. In view of these circumstances it is not in the least surprising that complaints were brought against him, and that the ecclesiastical authorities felt constrained to interfere. These authorities might, of course, have shown more tact and consideration in their dealings with a man of Irving's genius; and their final action in deposing him from the ministry cannot be excused. But it is quite evident that they were bound, in the circumstances, to take some measures in the interests of law and order. Nor can it be said that the utterances of Irving during his trial were fitted to impress his brethren with a sense of his sanity and reasonableness. For example, he described the Presbytery as "a court of Anti-

christ," and declared that those who would not accept the message of the new prophets were "plunging headlong into the wrath of God." He, further, made the somewhat arrogant claim: "It is for the name of Christ as Captain with the Holy Ghost that I am this day called in question before this court." [1]

These quotations sufficiently indicate the temper in which Irving confronted the authorities. It was a temper so extravagant in its assumptions and so alien to the spirit of conciliation, that it rendered his position almost indefensible. Indeed, the suggestion of something that was less than sane is manifest throughout the entire story of Irving's later days. Of this the closing scene in his trial before the Presbytery of Annan forms, itself, a painful illustration. It was the late afternoon of a March day and the place of meeting was dimly lit by one candle feebly burning. The long debate was about to reach its end, and the senior member of the Court was offering prayer for Divine guidance, before the taking of the final vote, when suddenly the voice of a minister, one of Irving's friends, was heard calling from amid the shadows that encompassed the room: "Arise, depart! Arise, depart! Depart! Depart! Flee! Flee!" When this eerie cry sounded in the obscurity, the audience leaped to its feet; and Irving arose, and strode out into the cheerless gloaming, crying as he went: "Stand forth!

[1] Cf. *Trial of Rev. Edward Irving*, etc. (Harding's Shorthand Report), pp. 45, 49 *et passim*.

Stand forth! What, will ye not obey the voice of the Holy Ghost? As many as will obey the voice of the Holy Ghost, let them depart." [1] Thus Irving "departed," not only from before the Presbytery but from the ministry of his ordination and the Church of his baptism. It was an exit characteristic of the man: dramatic, picturesque, forceful. But, alas, it was also piteous, betraying all too surely the signs of a mind that was overwrought and a heart that was near to the breaking. It is well to pass from the record in silence rather than seek to express any critical judgment on the last sad days of a great career—the career of a man who belonged to the race of the heroes, one of the noblest souls and most radiant spirits ever bestowed on the Scottish Church.

III.

It has been noted on a preceding page that the Church of Scotland enjoyed a long immunity from the trouble of heresy prosecutions, and that this state of things was largely due to the sacrifices and sufferings of Campbell and of others who were martyred like him in the bitter and passionate time which preceded the Disruption. Of course, this freedom from ecclesiastical strife on doctrinal points does not argue that the National Establishment was wanting in men of speculative mind or of combative temper. The vitality of that Church was shown in the rapidity with which it recovered

[1] Cf. Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving*, p. 395.

from the catastrophe of 1843; controversies within its Courts were many; and it contained in nearly every decade of the century a number of able men who departed from Confessional orthodoxy far more radically than Campbell. But its conflicts were concerned with matters like Patronage, Pluralities, Home and Foreign Missions, Church Worship, and the like, and its authorities and leaders showed a determined resolve to leave heretics alone. It did, indeed, experience a little mild excitement about questions that might be called theological; as when Norman MacLeod was attacked for his teaching about the Sabbath, and when John Caird was ineffectually threatened with prosecution for saying that he would rather perish with the heathen than worship a God who would cause the heathen to perish. Also, there was always a large party in the Church which disliked the tendencies of the "Broad" School, and a volume published by that school, entitled *Scotch Sermons*, provoked a discussion which led to a debate in the Assembly of 1884. Moreover, John MacLeod of Govan had some trouble with his Presbytery on the ground of his alleged liking for ritualistic practices and Sacramentarian doctrine. Still, it remains true that Campbell and Irving had no successors in the endurance of trial and deposition, until the middle of the '90's, when Alexander Robinson of Kilmun, a delightful personality but undoubtedly a heretic, was expelled from the ministry for the teaching contained in his radical work, *The Saviour in the Newer Light*.

In like manner, the Free Church was singularly exempt from ecclesiastical strife as to purely theological questions; evangelical orthodoxy, for the most part, reigned supreme within its borders. Certainly, Walter C. Smith, a distinguished poet and preacher and a man of wide and tender sympathies, was several times in the position of having strained relations with the authorities. One remembers, too, that William Knight had wrestlings over the question of Prayer. Dr. Dods and Dr. Bruce, also, had some experience of ecclesiastical baiting. But the only man who was actually condemned by the Free Church Assembly, and suffered a degree of penalty, was William Robertson Smith; and his offence was not theological but literary, a question of Biblical Criticism. This latter important Case does not come within the scope of this sketch, since it did not have final issue till four years after the Ferguson Trial ended. It is evident, however, that the finding in Smith's Case bore an unfortunate resemblance to the judgments in all the Trials that preceded it, inasmuch as it was inspired less by the merits of the question at issue, or the just requirements of law, than by considerations of pure expediency. Expediency, no doubt, has Wisdom for its father, but the mother of it is Fear; and the children of Fear are a treacherous brood. It was mainly for strategical reasons that Campbell was deposed, that James Morison was expelled from the Secession, that Fergus Ferguson went unscathed, though condemned, from the bar of the United Presbyterian

Synod, and that Robertson Smith lost his Chair. Expediency, however, as thus applied, revealed the uncertainty of its ways. It rid the Establishment of Campbell, but it neither stopped the Liberal movement nor delayed the Disruption; it dismissed from the service of the Free Church a brilliant scholar whom Dr. Rainy declared "impossible"; but it gave no pause to critical science, and it did not avail in the end to prevent disunion. In the Ferguson Case only was it really justified by the event, and its success then was due to the fact that, in his instance alone, the requirements of expediency were not wholly inconsistent with those of justice and reality.

The Secession, which became the United Presbyterian Church in 1847 by its union with the Relief, had no such experience of theological peace within its Courts as was enjoyed by the Established Church and the Free. For it fell to the Seceders to develop the debate on the Atonement which MacLeod Campbell had begun. From one point of view this circumstance is to be counted among the ironies of history; for the Seceders had been very hostile to Campbell, and had watched his Trial with close and somewhat self-complacent attention. At the same time, it was in the order of things that those who inherited the Erskine tradition should be required sooner or later to consider the relation of the Saviour's work to the fate of universal humanity. For, the opinions of the school to which Erskine belonged had been deeply influenced by a book of English theology

entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity.* This is not a treatise for which one can express any strong admiration; nor is it surprising that the Church of Scotland condemned it, for some of its statements had an antinomian sound, and its thinking revealed little of either method or moderation. But it was a fervent and sincere book, full of evangelical zeal, and it certainly taught that the offer of salvation in Christ was, in some sense, made to all mankind. Moreover, its doctrines were reproduced in Boston's *Fourfold State of Man.* This volume is in no respect a great production, and it reflects the characteristics of its author who reveals himself in his *Memoirs* as a man, earnest indeed, devout, and of tender affections, but childishly superstitious, gloomy in his theology, morbidly self-centred, and very intolerant towards all who were not of his own party. Nevertheless, it had a great reputation in its day and was a familiar book in the homes of the Seceders. Undoubtedly, also, it accustomed these followers of Erskine to the idea that the exhibition of the Cross of Christ was fitted to draw all men to the Saviour. Hence, the Secession, which was the home of extreme religious Conservatism, had yet, in the warm heart of its tradition, an element which, though it was inconsistently and perhaps even unconsciously entertained, had yet its logical issue in the Atonement Controversy of 1840–1845.

James Morison was not a man of the intellectual or personal power which we find in Campbell and Irving;

but he was both able in mind and scholarly in habit, profoundly Christian in character, and an evangelist of intense zeal and notable effect. As to his theological position there is little to be said, for it was in all important respects that which Campbell tried to defend at the time of his Trial. Universal Atonement and Pardon; Assurance of Faith; the efficacy of the Redeemer's work in making expiation for all sin except that of unbelief—these were his tenets as they had been the tenets of the Row heretic. So far as is known to the present writer, Morison never attributed the origin of his opinions to Campbell; but it is hardly conceivable that a man who began his theological studies within three years of the close of a famous controversy knew nothing of the issues involved in it and learned nothing from its contendings. In any case, Morison repeated almost exactly the assertions of the earlier reformer, and even echoed his phrases. If, indeed, it be true, as was claimed in 1841, that the Morisonian doctrine was inspired by the teaching of Dr. John Brown in his professorial lectures, then we must conclude that Dr. John Brown had himself drawn water from the wells of Campbell, or at least from neighbouring springs.

But, however this may be, it remains true that Morison simply uttered within his own communion the doctrines that had been condemned in the Church of Scotland. And his testimony brought upon him the same fate as had befallen the minister of Row. It

must be admitted, however, that the authorities of his Church showed in the beginning no desire to carry matters to a drastic end. After the charges against the accused had been declared proven by the Kilmarnock Presbytery the case was appealed to the Synod; and there for a time the course of the debate seemed favourable to the defender. Professors Brown and Balmer both spoke in his defence. At least, they pled that though on some points he might be in error, his teaching was yet such as ought to be tolerated within their Communion. This was a sound and magnanimous position, and it was supported by other speakers. Dr. Heugh, however, who led the Court, feared a disruption of the Church in the event of Morison being acquitted without his having conceded anything to the demands of the stricter brethren. He accordingly delivered a speech which began, indeed, by expressing agreement with much that had been said for the defence, but proceeded in a tone of acute and pertinent criticism, and ended with a proposal to remit the matter to a committee with authority to decide the issue. This proposal was in substance adopted; but the committee was refused executive powers and was directed to report to the Synod upon a certain day. This latter condition proved fatal; for Morison did not appear at the meeting of those appointed to confer with him, having indeed gone home to dispense the Communion to his own people. This action was in direct defiance of authority; and the result of it was

that, when the hour came on which the report had to be submitted, the committee could only announce its own failure and the disobedience of the accused. In these circumstances, no further patience was shown; and the name of James Morison was removed forthwith from the roll of ministers.

This decision was, no doubt, warranted in law by the conduct of the man thus deposed; but perhaps more forbearance might have been displayed had it not been that the rashness of the offender was seen to have provided a good reason for getting rid of him, and so evading all trouble and securing the unity of the Church. Nevertheless, the Synod need not have proceeded, as it did, to debar its ministers from communion with Morison. In thus excluding him from the pulpits of his brethren the Court took a step which created great bitterness and was in itself indefensible. It is remarkable that the United Presbyterian Church, as late as the '90's, refused to remove this ban on the heretic of 1841. But it is seldom that Churches make formal confession of a mistake once made; and they, even more than individuals, find it difficult to annul the effects of bygone indiscretions.

The later career of Morison is well known. In its theological aspect it was not remarkable. As time went on, he tended to approach more nearly to Arminianism than he had done when he left the Seceders. But he never fully recognised the speculative weakness of the position which he occupied in 1841. Campbell,

as we have seen, had tried to defend the same position during his own Trial, but the Assembly debate convinced him of his error, and he proceeded forthwith to that great task of radical reconstruction through which he has made the whole world his debtor. Morison, on the other hand, remained to the last not far from the tents of his youth. Nor did he make any decided mark on the thought of his age. He became involved a good deal in ecclesiastical cares, and his main achievement was the founding of a new sect, Congregational in polity, which was known as the Evangelical Union. As the leader of that denomination he displayed a great deal of practical ability, and was justly revered by his followers. As a preacher he never attained to the highest rank; but his exegetical works earned for him considerable reputation, and his evangelistic labours were great and effective.[1] The present writer remembers him in his old age as a venerable and dignified figure, mild and benignant, at peace with all men. To the understanding mind, his personality, at this period, had a strong imaginative appeal; for he represented an elder time and a world that was dead. He had acted a manful part in a battle which issued in a larger freedom; he belonged to history; and one was conscious in his presence of something indefinable that spoke of the experiences he had known. But his battles were then of long ago. The wilfulness and the impetuous courage of his youth had

[1] Cf. Adamson's *Life of Dr James Morison.*

ripened to a wise serenity; and the marks of the old days which yet remained were for beauty, not disfigurement. If, in looking back, he had something to regret, he had also something to forgive. But all the evils of the early time had vanished with the age to which they belonged; and the warring voices of the past seemed to reach the ears of the old soldier as a far-off harmony, while 'mid the mellow peace of the evening hour he rested in the quietness of faith.

IV.

The Atonement Controversy, however, did not end with this clergyman's deposition. It went on thereafter for four painful years; and the records of it are sorrowful reading to-day. If Dr. Heugh expected to achieve peace by his concessions to the Conservative party in the Morison Case, he was quickly undeceived. For that party were simply emboldened by their victory to attempt more daring deeds. They proceeded, therefore, to bring charges of heresy against Professors Balmer and Brown, the latter of whom was the greatest figure in the Church. This was a vexatious and an absurd enterprise, hopeless from the beginning, but it was pursued with incredible zeal. Driven by a band of resolute men, the Synod laboured round and round the old scholastic mill. All the ground of former strife, already a sufficiently trampled field, was traversed again and yet again. All the familiar arguments were

repeated and all the dreary logic was anew set forth. Ere the conflict reached its end Dr. Balmer had died worn out, and Dr. Brown had been required to resist two separate attacks, each of extreme violence. Of course, Dr. Brown was in the issue victorious, for great majorities supported him. But he must have emerged from the struggle bearing many scars ; and it is grievous to remember that such a man, after his long and splendid service, was compelled to endure so painful a trial. Nor can we doubt that many evils must have attended this protracted and polemical debate as to the sacred mysteries of salvation—a debate conducted in the presence of the religious public, and enveloped in the heated and passionate atmosphere of popular contention. Yet, in the main, the result of it all was good. For it issued in this, that the Seceders henceforth occupied a position as to the Atonement which was in advance of that held by other Presbyterian Churches. That position was in effect that the sacrifice of Christ secured a free offer of forgiveness to every man. The Redeemer's work was thus affirmed to have a " general " as well as a " particular " aspect, though no attempt was made to explain this affirmation or to reconcile it with Confessional Doctrine. The conclusion thus reached marked a stage in the progress of Scottish theology ; it was, indeed, an implicit departure from the Westminster Standards ; but it also bequeathed a difficult problem to the future age. It was plainly impossible for thoughtful minds to rest content with

the mere assurance that Christ had achieved *something* for the salvation of all mankind, something that was incapable of being stated. Sooner or later an attempt must be made to discover what was the actual nature and extent of the blessing secured for the human race by the Saviour of the World. This, indeed, as we shall see, was one of the tasks that Fergus Ferguson endeavoured to fulfil.

This last reference indicates the main end that has been held in view throughout this chapter; for the chief aim of the writer has been to prepare the way toward a true valuation of Dr. Ferguson's teaching. No fair estimate of that teaching can be attained so long as it is regarded as a mere sporadic speculation, an unrelated and purely individual adventure. It is only when we view the matter in the light of history that we discern the real place of Ferguson in the development of Scottish belief. If we bear in mind the contentions of Campbell and Morison, and also their issue in the fruits of the Atonement Controversy, we shall see that the heretic of the '70's was seeking to answer questions which his predecessors had left unsolved. He therefore stood in the line of a true theological succession, and his work was an inevitable sequel to the toils and sacrifices of those who went before.

It may be said, perhaps, that in the foregoing discussion the cause of the reformers has been too warmly espoused, and that less than due credit has been given

to the conservatives who opposed them, and to those who had to steer the ecclesiastical ship in stormy waters and 'mid perilous tides. And if this were a fair criticism it would be a serious one, for the claims of authority are of moment as well as those of freedom, and the task of the leaders of any Church in a crisis that threatens disruption is a heavy and responsible burden. It may even be granted that the conflicts of sects and parties have their own qualities of usefulness. Moreover, the Church as a whole, in all its branches, is required to guard well the treasures of faith. It cannot allow itself to forget that it is the guardian, not only of the wise and learned, but also of the simple and the ignorant, of the many believing people whose dear traditions are offended by rash and ill-considered speech; and of those devotional habits that are apt to be sorely injured by the public debating of holy things. But while this is all true, it represents an aspect of the case which Presbyterians at least are in small danger of forgetting. Less recognised, at most times, and therefore more in need of emphasis, are the claims of that reasonable liberty without which independent study of the truth is thwarted, adventurous minds are denied their rightful range, honesty of utterance is stifled, and metaphysical genius made of none effect. A living Church must have a living creed. And there cannot be a living creed without a race of thinkers, brave and free, who are at constant work to correct and adjust the forms of faith. No doubt, it is the strength of

Religion that it contains so much that is historical, that is emotional, that is symbolic ; but this also is its danger, for the products of history, of feeling, of imagination, are peculiarly prone to lose their life and their significance. Hence there is always need of the criticism and the testing which are applied by independent spirits, lovers of reason, and friends of reality. The lamp of devotion is fed with oil that is drawn from regions of vital thought ; and the men who are fit to draw the oil and to nourish the sacred flame are men whose hearts are unafraid. Inasmuch, also, as the Divine Revealer does, in every generation, intrust a message to such as are worthy of His fellowship, there must surely be granted to these a large forbearance, a glad indulgence, while they endeavour, perhaps with faltering speech, to interpret for others the truth they have received.

CHAPTER II.

THE DALKEITH CASE.

(FERGUSON'S FIRST ARRAIGNMENT.)

The United Presbyterian Church was disturbed by no theological conflicts of any moment during the twenty-five years which followed the close of the Atonement Controversy. It is true that Dr. Joseph Brown, with others, in 1846, raised the question of Creed Revision, and even persuaded the Synod to appoint a committee for the consideration of the matter. But this committee never reported, for the Union of 1847 interrupted its labours, and the subject was tacitly dropped. It is to be noticed, also, that George Gilfillan of Dundee often fulminated against the Confession, but no one viewed his theological excursions with any great alarm; his brethren were rather proud of him as a picturesque literary figure and an orator of power, and his occasional turbulence was regarded with indulgence. For the rest, the Church was busy with the consolidating of her position, the extending of her borders, and the prosecution of her missionary work; and all was quiet in her schools of thought. Things would have been

otherwise, no doubt, had Thomas Carlyle fulfilled his original intention and entered the ranks of the Seceding clergy, for some of whom he expressed so much regard. It is to be feared that his ministerial career would have been short and eventful: that explosive genius would either have propelled himself out of the Church, or else he would have shaken it to its base. At any rate, there was certainly no Carlyle in any pulpit anywhere; and the United Presbyterian Church went on its useful way in peace. Nevertheless, beneath the surface there were forces of change at work, and the logic of the position adopted in 1845 was moving silently to its end. The '70's began with signs of war, and the Dalkeith Case had a significance that was not at the time perceived.

I.

Ferguson's Earlier Career.

As this Dalkeith Case marks the first appearance of Fergus Ferguson in the theological arena, it may be well at this point to recall what manner of man he was and what the influences were which had gone to form his character. He was, as has been said, of Celtic blood; indeed, he was probably the first of his kindred to be born and bred in the city. For the home of his people was Perthshire; and his father, Hume Ferguson, was one of the many Highlanders who in that generation removed into Glasgow to push their fortunes

there. His mother, however, was an Ulster woman, and seems to have possessed the vigour and independence of character which distinguish the sturdy North of Ireland folk. It is not fanciful to say that both strains in his inheritance were evident in Fergus Ferguson. From one side of the house he derived the mystical imaginative mind, the gifts of fire and passion, and the natural courtesy of manner which are so often found in the Highlander; and there were discernible also in him the attributes of his mother's ancestry, determination, tenacity, and stern devotion to duty. Certainly he had need of these latter qualities; for his father died at the age of thirty-two, leaving his wife and children but ill-provided with material resources. Hence it was that Fergus, the eldest of the family, was involved at an early age in that battle with adverse circumstance which has been the experience of so many eminent Scottish Presbyterians: of men, for instance, like Flint, Cairns, and Ker. No doubt this discipline was not without its value, for it was fitted to develop strength and self-control; but the immediate effect of his home difficulties was to delay his entrance upon the proper vocation of his life, and indeed to threaten him with a permanent deflection from his true career.

At school, Fergus proved himself a pupil of conspicuous talent; and in the ordinary course of things he would have proceeded directly from the school to the University. It was necessary, however, that he should seek as soon

as possible to support himself and to relieve his mother of the burden which she had for many years so heroically borne. He therefore entered upon a commercial course, and in it he persevered for a considerable period with credit and with promise; he received an excellent business training, and came finally to hold a good situation in the employment of one of the great city houses, Arthur & Company. Before attaining this measure of success, however, he had certain hard and trying experiences; and one of these may be noted, as it illustrates qualities which always distinguished him. The incident referred to is thus described by Dr. Ferguson's son, the Rev. James Ferguson, B.D.: "At first he was fortunate in having for master a good man who trained him well; and if his next experience of business life was less happy, it at least revealed the moral sensitiveness, the unhesitating decision, and scorn of consequence that were characteristic of the man throughout his career. One day he was told to do something that in his opinion verged on dishonesty: he declined to do it. 'You must either do this or go,' declared his employer. 'That,' answered Ferguson, 'is an alternative which does not require a moment's consideration.' He put on his hat and walked out to the street."

This gallant youth who went forth into the street, not deeming a dishonourable alternative to require a moment's consideration, was the same man who in after years proposed to resign a great pastorate because he felt his integrity to be compromised, and who before

Presbytery and Synod witnessed, at much personal sacrifice, a good confession.

Ferguson's business experience was, however, something of an irrelevance in his life. Commercial pursuits never seem to have had attraction for him; nor did the years spent in office and warehouse leave much visible mark upon his character. No one meeting him in later days would ever have conjectured the occupations of his youth. There was nothing in his bearing to suggest the "dusky lane and wrangling mart"; he seemed rather as one who had been throughout all his years a student, a man of thought and of books. Indeed, it is manifest that the pith and moment of those early days consisted less in the long hours of his daily task than in the intervals of his leisure that were given to study, to congenial companionship like that of Alexander Smith, the poet, and others of kindred mind. The mental atmosphere of Glasgow at that time had in it the quickening thrill of a somewhat stormy spring; for the city was increasing by leaps and bounds, going from strength to strength, full of fiery political and social activity, and stretching out its arms, uncouth but vigorous, in constantly widening enterprises. Such surroundings begot in men the spirit of the pioneer, and inspired youths of Ferguson's type with intellectual curiosity, the enthusiasm of humanity, and a love of the great literature which is the mirror of life in all its wonder and power. It was during his business career that Ferguson acquired that intimate knowledge of

Shakespeare and Milton which was so apparent in all his later utterances.

He derived also a great deal of mental, as well as spiritual, stimulus from the fellowship of the congregation (East Campbell Street, afterwards Sydney Place) to which he belonged. He was a leader, for instance, in the Literary Association of that church; and this must have been in his time a society of unusual vigour and interest, for it included in its membership men who afterwards became distinguished. Among these were Stephen Mason, later a well-known member of Parliament; Munro Gibson, celebrated in subsequent years as Dr. Munro Gibson of London; and James Orr, who attained so wide a renown as professor of theology and as author of *The Christian View of God and the World*. But much as Ferguson must have owed to this fellowship, his chief indebtedness was to the minister of the congregation, Dr. John Ker. This illustrious preacher became pastor of East Campbell Street Church in 1851; and his advent exercised a decisive influence on the course of Ferguson's life. Ker soon detected the abilities of the young man who was so active in the life of the congregation, and finally counselled him to surrender his commercial prospects and to enter the ministry of the Church. This advice was in harmony with the whole bent of Ferguson's mind, and probably did no more than interpret to him with authority the voice of his own heart. In any case, the year 1856 saw his matriculation as a student in the University of Glasgow.

Of his college career we have no very full information. But it is recorded that he was a prize-man in Mathematics, Logic, Moral Philosophy, and in the composition of English verse. It is interesting to notice also that he was similarly distinguished in the Hebrew class of Professor Duncan Weir. Weir was a famous master of his subject; and many eager United Presbyterian students sought to find in his instruction a more accurate and thorough knowledge of the Old Testament language than the denominational Hall in Edinburgh was understood to bestow. In like manner, many students, proceeding to the ministry of this voluntary Church, used at a somewhat later date to attend the theological lectures of Professor John Caird. Among these was James Orr, whom Dr. Caird regarded as one of his most eminent pupils.

Concerning Ferguson's student days his son, James, gives us some further information which, though not belonging strictly to academic life, is interesting. Thus he tells us that his father was a prominent member of the Johnsonian society in the city, and that he was associated also with James Orr in the undenominational Young Men's Association, to which the latter owed the impulse which led him into the service of the Church. Mr. Ferguson also gives us a rather amusing and significant note regarding the origin of his father's intimacy with Dr. Joseph Leckie of Ibrox, and with the Rev. Ernest Scott, a very able man, whose son is the brilliant New Testament scholar, Dr. E. F. Scott of Union

Theological Seminary, New York. "While Leckie was at Muirton he formed a deep and lasting friendship with Fergus Ferguson, and when he demitted his charge and came to live for a time in Glasgow, he and Ernest Scott were constant visitors in Ferguson's home. They were in the habit of sitting far into the night, and Ferguson's mother used to give them tea and coffee. But their visits were so frequent and their sederunts so protracted, that the good woman at last declared that she would purchase small bowls, one for each, and give them porridge and milk, but nothing more."

When we remember all these things we understand a good deal that is obscure in Ferguson's later history. We see, for instance, how it was that Dr. Orr came to be so warm a defender of the heretic in 1878, and why Dr. Leckie was so perplexed when he found himself unable to follow his old friend in his theological adventures; why, also, Dr. Ker experienced so much sorrow when the man whom he had deeply influenced in the earlier days came to be the advocate of opinions to which he himself was utterly opposed.

It is remarkable that when Ferguson left college his metaphysical convictions were by no means in harmony with the tenets of the Scottish philosophy as then taught in Glasgow. It appears that while he was a student he came to adopt the doctrines of Hegel, which for some years thereafter he maintained. It would be interesting to know how he came to be acquainted with the German Idealism; for, of course,

the star of Edward Caird had not yet arisen in the academic firmament, and the Presbyterian mind as a whole was quite untouched by Transcendentalism. Certainly, the sway of that type of thought was then a mighty one throughout the world, and was apparent in the works of men like Carlyle, Tennyson, and Browning. It is to be remembered, too, that Ferrier of St. Andrews had introduced a type of it into Scottish teaching, and that John MacLeod Campbell, whose book, *The Nature of the Atonement*, was published in 1856, was undoubtedly influenced by it. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conjecture how young Ferguson was able to acquire his intimate knowledge of Hegel; though the fact that he did so remains, and is the explanation of all the intellectual enterprise of his theological life.

After leaving Glasgow University he proceeded to the United Presbyterian Divinity Hall, and was in due course ordained to the ministry, at Dalkeith, in the year 1864. He was at that time aged thirty-two, but looked a great deal younger than his years. Indeed, until nearly the end of a long life he maintained an aspect of youthfulness, in so much that at the time of his Trial, when he was aged forty-five, he was commonly referred to by speakers as "our young brother." Heretics have very often been men of engaging personality, and certainly Fergus Ferguson was singularly prepossessing in appearance, in bearing, and in character. He had a most winning grace of manner, and was able

to inspire an almost romantic affection in the minds especially of younger men. His countenance was in its expression and cast of feature both strong and comely; and his grey eyes looked out upon the world with a benevolent but keen regard. Interested as he was in his fellow-men, widely human in his sympathy, and tenacious in his friendships, he yet lived for the world of ideas; and whatever time was left him from the cares of a busy pastorate was devoted to continuous study. Philosophy and theology were the engrossment of his entire career.

It may seem as if a theologian and scholar of Ferguson's type would have been very slow to engage in war. And certainly those who met him in social intercourse, or knew him only as a pastor, or listened to his beautiful and devout conduct of public worship, might easily have supposed him the most peaceful and least contentious of men. Nevertheless, he had in him qualities which were almost certain, especially in those days, to involve a man in conflict. His meditative, gentle, and contemplative air did not completely represent his complex character; for he was of an impetuous temperament, he was sometimes masterful in tone, and his style of controversy, while never disfigured by personalities or discourtesy, was often very pungent and polemical. His intellect, also, was speculative, restless, and daring; he was absolutely direct in purpose; and he had a habit of turning ideas over and over in his mind until, as he mused, his imagina-

tion became afire and the necessity of utterance swept upon him. At such a time he expressed himself in language which often attained a high degree of impassioned eloquence, and he spoke without the slightest thought of cost or fear of penalty. He never, indeed, lost self-control; but there was in his eye the gleam of steel, and there came into his musical voice a vibrant note of intense and stern conviction. In these prophetic moods he was a formidable force; for he possessed the gifts of a public speaker; his conduct of debate was adroit and skilful; his language virile; his sincerity manifest; and his dialectic was driven home by the weight of a powerful personality.

Such being the characteristics of the man it does not altogether surprise us that he came into collision with the ecclesiastical authorities. In any case, Ferguson was throughout a great part of his active ministry engaged in continual debate. He had not been long minister at Dalkeith when he created a little tempest by the delivery from his own pulpit of a vigorous protest against the exaggerated homage which he thought was being paid to the character of Robert Burns. He really said no more on that occasion than Stevenson did later, and far less than Henley; but he brought upon himself quite a clamour of denunciation, chief among his critics being the well-known George Gilfillan of Dundee. Nor is this to be wondered at; for whoever in Scotland utters a word to the disparagement of Burns must expect to fare as if he had attacked

the Covenanters. Nevertheless, the incident illustrates the moral courage and the indifference to popular laudation which were always distinctive of Ferguson. Hardly had this trouble ended, also, when he was arraigned before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, being accused of speculation as to the Intermediate State and the destiny of the heathen.

Even before the close of his student days, Fergus Ferguson had bent himself to the task of theological construction; a task from which he did not desist till heart and flesh began to faint and fail. In this work he made great progress during his Dalkeith ministry, and there occur passages in his early sermons which show that within five years of ordination his scheme of thought had begun to bear its characteristic features. It is probable that ere the '60's were ended the main outlines of his system were already present to his vision, though perhaps in a fashion rather vague and mistily defined. The misfortune was that he was suddenly compelled by circumstance to state and defend a small portion of his doctrine which was as yet imperfectly related to the whole. Just as the action of ecclesiastical authority had taken Campbell unawares while his opinions were still in the initial stage of transition, and were incapable of enduring a sustained attack, so Ferguson was required by his Presbytery to give an account of his position before it had been adequately apprehended even by himself.

This Presbyterial arraignment constitutes what is

known as the Dalkeith Case, which was almost as famous in its day as was the later Glasgow Prosecution. Indeed, the two Cases had many points of resemblance and of contact. The impeachment of 1871 was, as we shall see, the main source of Ferguson's movement for the revision of the Creed, which in turn led to his Trial for Heresy in 1877–1878. It is to be noted, also, that some of his most loyal champions throughout the latter Controversy were friends of the Dalkeith days: such as Joseph Brown, James Jeffrey, and J. E. H. Thomson. Again, each of the Fergusonian conflicts owed its beginning to the action of laymen; each constituted a danger to the unity of the Church; and each was ended by the mediation of a Synodical Committee. In both, further, the Defender showed the same impulsiveness, the same power of impetuous attack, and the same general courtesy and self-command. In both, finally, he was supported by the devotion of his own people; for the Buccleuch Street congregation, in 1871, was not less willing than was that of Queen's Park, in 1878, to follow its minister whithersoever he might go. But, apart from all this, the Dalkeith Case formed in itself an extremely hard and trying experience for the man chiefly concerned, and did much to cloud for him the memory of his otherwise singularly happy and fruitful ministry in his first charge. Indeed, the truth is that his highly sensitive temperament was not well fitted to sustain the wounds and buffets of theological strife. He himself told the present writer

that when he was suddenly accused of heresy at a meeting of his own session he experienced for the first time that momentary nervous disturbance which recurred with increasing frequency throughout his later years.

II.

The Dalkeith Case.

It is doubtful whether any theological controversy ever had so curious an origin as had the Dalkeith Case. The trouble was begun by one of Ferguson's own elders who, in 1871, laid a complaint against his minister before the Edinburgh Presbytery. This complaint had two sides, a personal and a theological; and, of these, the one was ridiculous and the other was vexatious. As to the former, it amounted to this, that Mr. Ferguson had given his contributions to religious purposes in the ordinary way and had ignored a collecting-box placed in the vestry for the pastor's especial and peculiar use. It is almost incredible that such a triviality should ever have been brought to the attention of a Presbyterian Court. But the incident may be recorded as an example of the paltry element which is sometimes found in congregational affairs. It was a painful enough experience at the time, as are all things that are at once ludicrous and bitter, but it passed quickly away into the limbo of all "the spites and the follies." The other accusation, which was unequally yoked with

this pettiness, was to the effect that the Rev. Fergus Ferguson had, in preaching on Christ's Descent into Hades (1 Pet. iii. 18–20), taught that salvation was possible beyond the grave, and that even the fallen angels would all be restored to their first estate. This latter indictment carries us into a region of high debate ; and we can sympathise with a Presbytery which was required to pass at a step from the question of a collecting-box to the problems of ultimate destiny. That they were able to compass this feat illustrates, surely, the vigorous agility of the ecclesiastical mind.

It must be admitted, however, that the Presbytery discharged its duty with dignity and precision. As to the collecting-box, the Court may be said to have thrown it out of the window, incontinently and with haste. In the end, also, the offending elder was made to share the fate of his box, for he was directed to withdraw himself from the Session. The theological side of the complaint was, however, a very different matter, and of it the Court took a serious view : the mere mention of the Intermediate State was enough to disquiet any Presbyterian tribunal of that day. It was, therefore, to a vigilant and critical, if not hostile, audience that Ferguson made his opening statement in answer to his accuser. Unfortunately the newspaper report of this first speech is palpably inaccurate and elliptical, so that it requires to be accepted with caution. It is evident, however, that the speaker began by explaining the sense in which he had interpreted St. Peter's teaching.

He believed the Apostle's doctrine to be that Christ Jesus, "co-ordinately with His passing from this earthly arena, was made manifest in the spiritual world, the disembodied state of souls." There He was revealed "as a living Saviour" and, in particular, "carried the knowledge of what He had accomplished on earth to a certain class of those who inhabited the unseen world." "I regard the preacher as Christ, and not the Spirit in Noah; the sphere of the preaching, a department of the invisible world; the beings to whom the preaching was addressed, spirits imprisoned there; the time of the preaching, between the death and resurrection of Christ; the subject-matter of the preaching, Christ Himself and His finished work; the design of the preaching, to let those addressed know something they did not know before, and apparently to set before them such a knowledge of salvation as they had not when upon the earth."

This is, of course, the obvious interpretation of the passage in question; and indeed is the only one which is in harmony with early Church tradition. Whether or no St. Peter was the author of these verses, they are certainly the oldest extant expression of a belief which was commonly, if not universally, held in the post-apostolic age. Ferguson was only doing his duty, as a scholar, when he stated to his people the facts of the case. Nor did the Presbytery question his right to expound this, or any other, New Testament utterance in terms of the meaning he believed it to bear. What

concerned them was the theological conclusions which he deduced from the passage. And it must be confessed that his explanations on this point were not very clear. He naturally did not desire to be involved in controversy as to a region of thought which he was, as yet, only beginning to explore.

He pled that, whatever doctrinal conclusions he had suggested had not been stated "in a dogmatic way," but only as possible inferences from the Apostolic teaching. Among these were a hopeful view as to the future of the heathen and of all who had not had the opportunity of accepting Christ in this present world. He admitted, also, having said that the generally accepted doctrine of infant salvation involved the possibility of creatures being regenerated in the world to come. He pointed out, indeed, that the Confession of Faith itself implied this view. "The Confession places the salvation of infants upon the same basis as the salvation of all other human creatures, namely, the election of God. It teaches that infants, as well as others, must be born again in order to salvation; but it declares that this new birth may take place when, where, and how the Spirit pleaseth; plainly intimating that as to the circumstances of time, place, and manner, the regeneration of such infants may be effected altogether apart from those conditions with which we are conversant."

Ferguson further admitted having taught that the Son of God in His creative work had laid a basis on

which all creatures, whether angels or men, might have been saved. Further, he had maintained that increase of spiritual knowledge was possible in the Intermediate State, and that this knowledge might be bestowed by the ministrations of departed saints and might be mediated also by the Church on earth as it advanced in the understanding of things Divine. "Our work here is sending out influences into the whole universe. As the truth is unfolded in the Church in time, angels and past generations of men are being taught by it." Generally, the speaker continued, his teaching had been that the "mercy of God was wider and higher than our conceptions of it." "What I believe is that God must deal with all creatures in accordance with His own revealed character as the absolute Justice and Love."

All this seems to us in our day very moderate and inoffensive. And the sequel showed that, as already suggested, Ferguson was, in this opening speech, seeking to avoid debate by saying as little about controversial matters as he honestly could. The Presbytery, however, had a shrewd perception that his views were not quite so orthodox as they sounded; and they were indisposed to humour him in his desire for peace. The men of most influence in the Court at that time were Dr. Harper, Dr. Peddie, and Dr. Andrew Thomson; and these were all Calvinists of a somewhat strict type. They were perfectly aware that behind Ferguson's expressions there lay a mode of thought which was

not theirs. Dr. Harper at least was, further, well able to discern that the speech just delivered presented features that were very open to logical attack. The consequence was that the defender was subjected to a long cross-examination of a searching and almost inquisitorial kind. The questions put to him were all really reducible to one: Were those to whom Christ preached in Hades persons in a state of salvation and only requiring more light, or were they condemned persons who were presented with a new opportunity of conversion? But this question was put in ever so many different ways and was reiterated over and over again with inexhaustible suspicion. This suspicion was also quickened by some of Ferguson's answers. For instance, he said: "I suppose all salvation is in eternity. The fact is that, so far from salvation being in time, its culmination is in eternity." This was a characteristic saying, which, however, did not please the Court, one member exclaiming, "Did ever you hear the like of that?"

How long this cross-examination of a much exasperated man might have gone on without rebuke it is impossible to estimate, had it not been for the intervention of a highly respected minister, Dr. Davidson, who uttered an indignant protest against "this vexatious and un-Presbyterian proceeding." He also came to the rescue of Ferguson by volunteering an explanation of his position, which the latter gladly accepted. "If I am not mistaken," said Dr. Davidson, "these questions

proceed on the supposition that Mr. Ferguson, while interpreting that passage in St. Peter according to what appeared to him to be the truth, represented it as containing the revelation of the ordinary grace of God. If I mistake not, he separated between the two, and merely said that from such a passage as that we might cherish hopes beyond what the revelation lays down regarding many who had departed from this life apparently unsaved. He founded no dogmatic truth or doctrine on the passage."

When Ferguson expressed his assent to this, matters might well have ended; but the Court was still unsatisfied. Members seemed to develop a desire to set problems for the accused on the whole round of theology. At last the reporters grew tired of recording the multitudinous requests for varied information; and what the defender thought of it all, "it's better only guessing." Nor did the end of the ordeal give hope of rest to come; for a committee was appointed "to confer with Mr. Ferguson and report to the next meeting."

III.

Thus began Ferguson's progress along the *via dolorosa* of ecclesiastical prosecution, of which no man, in the whole history of the Scottish Church, had a more tiresome experience. There can be no doubt that this first brief stage of his journey upon the path of trial was a very painful one and fitted to render him sus-

picious as to the fairness of Presbyterial methods. The process of prolonged cross-examination to which he was subjected was oppressive and unjust; he would have been within his rights had he refused to make any statement, and so required his accuser to prove his case. His acquiescence in an irregular procedure was, no doubt, due to his desire for peace, but the fruit of it was trouble. For his consultations with the committee appointed to "confer" with him did not in the least resemble conferences; they were really like examinations by a bench of judges. And the effect of this was that Ferguson emerged from this ordeal with a sense of having suffered injustice, and with a pronounced distaste for "methods of conciliation." This appeared on the day when the committee presented its report.

This report was found to be of a generally conciliatory character. It was to the effect that the charges against Mr. Ferguson had been greatly exaggerated; that he had never taught the doctrine that the fallen angels might yet be saved or that an offer of redemption would in a future state be made to those who had definitely rejected it here; but that he had maintained that there would be "a presentation of the truths of Christ in the world to come" to such as had not had the opportunity of receiving it in this world. The report concluded as follows: "Your committee beg to recommend—first, that the Presbytery shall declare that they find no warrant in Scripture for the opinion that those who have not had salvation preached to them here will have it

offered to them in a future life; and, second, that they counsel Mr. Ferguson against introducing into his ministry speculations or opinions going beyond the line of Divine revelation, and so raising questions that minister strife rather than godly edifying which is in faith."

This deliverance sounded moderate enough; but in offering "counsel" to a man who was not subject to censure it was unfair and provocative. Dr. Davidson saw this, and moved that "the Presbytery rests satisfied with Mr. Ferguson's previous explanations." At this point, however, Ferguson interposed with a prepared speech which revealed the temper of mind to which he had now been driven, and greatly disturbed the Court. The scene which followed was, indeed, tense and dramatic, as may be learned from David Macrae's account of it in the *Glasgow Herald*:

"The matter is just about to be ended in this quiet and inoffensive way, when, to the manifest alarm of not a few, Mr. Ferguson is seen rising and making his way round to the Moderator's chair. No one unacquainted with the man would imagine, to look at his melancholy eye and the quietness and modesty of his manner, as he takes his place at the Moderator's right, and begins to unfold some sheets of paper, with what thunderbolts of smashing argument and withering rebuke he is about to astound and horrify the grave and reverend Court. But some of the Doctors of Divinity down in the front benches have come from experience to know that something alarming may be slumbering in the bosom of this apparent calm. You can see several of

them glancing uneasily at their young Dalkeith brother; still more uneasily at the paper which he is straightening out. For whatever effect the soft lulling music they have been practising for the last half-hour may have had on him, it can have had none on his manuscript.

"Mr. Ferguson begins to read in a clear, calm, and deliberate voice, every sentence terminating, as his manner is, with a peculiar sad cadence. He begins by explaining what he means by an intermediate state, and vindicates his right to hold it, even from the Confession of Faith. But he does not stop with this. He proceeds to denounce the framing of a human system of dogmas, and trying to force everything into it, and to prevent the discovery of anything at variance with it as insulting to God and subversive of truth. He demands liberty to investigate, fully and freely, everything in God's revelation, whether it should prove consistent or inconsistent with the so-called Standards of Faith. He declares that Calvinism, at its best, is but a part of the truth—that God is higher, and broader, and deeper, than Calvinism, or any human system whatever.

"An awful silence by this time reigns. The assembled divines listen with amazement, some of them with evident terror. But Mr. Ferguson is not yet done. He has been dragged into this case against his will. He has been put, as he believes, in an unjustifiable manner upon his defence, and he is going to give the Presbytery a little more of his mind. Launching out on the question of the heathen, he fulminates, with kindling eye, and a voice rising in its force and vehemence, against the complacent Christianity that makes itself comfortable at home and yet consigns to perdition the countless millions abroad whom it pronounces to be perishing for want of the knowledge committed to its care. He declares his belief that millions of the heathen world will crowd

into the kingdom of heaven, while the Scribes and Pharisees of Christendom will be cast out. He goes on next to speak of the 'counsel' which the Presbytery proposes to administer to him because he has dared to investigate for himself the Word of God, and to find in this disputed passage in *Peter* a meaning different from some of his brethren. Is it to be understood, he asks, that because such investigation may sometimes yield results calculated to disturb preconceived opinions, therefore it is to be prohibited? Is it to be understood that the clerical householder is to bring forth from his treasury only things that are old, and never any that are new, and that the authorities would be better pleased with a man who maundered on from one inanity to another, because, in that case, no one's mind would be disturbed? He declares that this miserable conception of the work of the pulpit has done and is doing infinite mischief to the Church, and that nothing can save us but living ideas and a fuller embrace of the Gospel of Christ in its glorious freeness, amplitude, and impartiality.

"When he closes and returns to his seat there is an awkward pause. Some of the old ministers, who have never heard such a speech in a Church Court before, and would not have believed that any man in the U.P. Church, except perhaps the Philistine giant in Dundee, would have dared to make it, are struck speechless. Dr. Smart stares after the perpetrator of this tremendous outrage, as if trying to discover whether all this is reality or only part of a dreadful nightmare dream. In the midst of the dead silence, a few sympathetic spirits in the back benches, bolder than the rest, begin to applaud furtively with their feet, but the noise is like the knocking at Macbeth's castle-gate in the murder scene, and is speedily hushed.

"At last one doctor, and then another, gets up to deplore the speech to which they have just listened.

Dr. Peddie, when he finds his breath, declares that he does not know what to do, but thinks it needless to propose counselling a man who will evidently not listen to it. Dr. Davidson himself is dubious; but he insists that the vote should be taken on the original motions; and if anyone feels bound to take action on this speech, let him do it afterwards.

"There can be no doubt how the vote will go now. The wonder is, that seventeen members of Presbytery are found bold enough to vote with Dr. Davidson for dismissing the case *simpliciter*.

"So, in the meantime, the matter ends. If no further action is taken, the area of liberty in the U.P. Church is already extended, and a barrier removed from the path of many. If further action is taken, this speech of Fergus Ferguson's is likely to be the opening gun of a war, the magnitude and issue of which it is not easy to foretell."

So much for the externals of this crisis in the Dalkeith Case. It is well, however, to add a quotation from Ferguson's speech, which shows with what vigour and decision he set forth the view which he had now adopted as to the theological question that was immediately at issue:

"By an intermediate state I mean simply a state of being between two other states; and by *the* intermediate state that state of being which lies between the present temporal condition and the future eternal condition; in other words, between the death and the resurrection of the body. That this is not a state of blank torpor to any is asserted by the Confession where it says, that the state into which men pass after death is one in which their souls neither die nor sleep. If,

then, souls, in the state immediately following the present, neither die nor sleep, we cannot doubt that the experience of such a momentous transition as that of passing from one state of existence to another must vastly augment their knowledge. Further, according to the Confession, all souls, whatever their moral character, immediately return to the source of their existence. But can anyone conceive of a fully-conscious intelligence returning to the source of its existence without experiencing a further marvellous enlargement of its knowledge? An enlargement, then, of knowledge takes place in the intermediate state. Now, it is an axiom in regard to moral responsibility, as it is a principle running through the whole of Scripture, that increase of knowledge means increase of responsibility; and since there is an increase of knowledge in the intermediate state there must also be a corresponding increase of responsibility. But no human spirit can return to the Father of Spirits except by the Son. Therefore it is by Christ that the spirits of all return immediately to the Father of Spirits. Hence the increased knowledge of God implied in returning to God is also an increased knowledge of Christ. So that from the Confession itself we may fairly deduce that there is a presentation or exhibition of the truth of Christ to those who pass into the middle state; and that such presentation, resulting necessarily in an increase of knowledge, may, with the utmost propriety, be also regarded as an increase or consummation of responsibility. After this comes the judgment, or day when the final doom of every creature is declared. All this can be distinctly thought of apart from the question of probation, or the question as to the accepting or rejecting of the truth so presented. Indeed, in the Calvinistic system the question of probation, properly so called, has little or no place. For the non-elect have no power to will what is good, and the elect have

their wills determined by Almighty power. It is only in eternity that the will of man, according to the Confession, is made perfectly and immutably free. The objection, therefore, that an enlargement of knowledge, in the intermediate state, opens up a new term of probation, and necessarily involves an accepting or rejecting of the truth discovered there, is entirely met by the Calvinistic doctrine, that in the present state the vast majority have, strictly speaking, no probation at all; and if it were necessary to find an argument for a renewal or prolongation of probation in another state, it could nowhere be more easily found than in the Confession of Faith. But it is quite evident that a mere extension of knowledge in another state no more opens up a new probation in that state than an extension of knowledge in the present state implies a change of the moral footing of the being to whom the knowledge is communicated. It certainly adds to his responsibility, but it does not necessarily involve any radical change of moral character. It is, therefore, perfectly consistent to say that there is an increase of knowledge in the intermediate state, and that an increase of knowledge—taking place especially before the judgment—means an increase of responsibility. It brings home to the conscience with augmented power the reality of moral distinctions, and it develops into the light of consciousness germs of being, and phases of character, of which in time we may have no idea; with regard to those who in time have thoroughly rejected the truth, and consequently died in a state of absolute non-acceptance with God, the revelations of the future can have no remedial power; but with regard to all the rest of mankind, in whom there is fidelity to truth as a grain of mustard seed, in whom there is any lingering spark of reverence, tenderness, or love, and who sink out of our sight under a mountain-load of sin, it may be, in other respects, dying even

in despair of themselves, through false ideas of God —who will affirm that when they come to a true idea of God these germs of good may not spring up, even in their own consciousness, to newness of life ? " [1]

IV.

The subsequent history of the Dalkeith Case may be set forth with brevity, for it contained no fresh theological development, though it was certainly full of alarms. Mr. Macrae's hope that no further steps might be taken in the matter of Ferguson's speech was not fulfilled. When next the Presbytery met much indignation was expressed regarding the substance as well as the temper of that speech, and the following motion was adopted :

" That Mr. Ferguson be asked whether the report of his paper read at the regular meeting in December, as contained in the *Dalkeith Herald*, is correct ; and in the event of his acknowledging it to be so, that the Presbytery take said report into consideration."

In due course Mr. Ferguson intimated that the newspaper record referred to was accurate ; and a Committee, with Dr. Harper as convener, was appointed to examine the speech and report. This task was duly performed, and the result was embodied in a trenchant address by the Convener, who applied to Ferguson's oration such

[1] Cf. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment* (1879), pp. 15–17.

terms as "insolent" and "offensive"; he also described its doctrine as calculated to work great moral mischief; and he concluded by saying that it lay with the Presbytery to take such further measures as it might think fit. The Presbytery, however, after long debate, did not think fit to take any further measures of any sort. This decision was not to the mind, was indeed to the astonishment, of those who had hitherto led the Court. It, in fact, indicated a desire to leave open a certain class of theological questions which had long been considered outwith the realm of speculation. Dr. Harper and others, therefore, thought it their duty to carry the matter to the Synod, and forthwith tabled notice of protest and appeal. In this course they were followed by the elder who had begun the whole trouble; so that these eminent divines proceeded to the Supreme Court in disparate alliance with the hero of the collecting-box.

When the Synod met and in due course took into consideration the appeals in the Dalkeith Case, Mr. Ferguson did not appear. But Dr. Davidson, who had been his chivalrous defender throughout the whole proceedings, made an extremely able speech on his behalf; and it was evident that he carried with him the sympathies of very many in the Court. Indeed, the newspaper accounts make it clear that there was, not only much division of opinion, but also a great deal of excitement among the members of the Synod. This is always a dangerous state of things in a Presbyterian

assembly; and ecclesiastical leaders in such circumstances almost invariably seek to avoid a decisive conflict. Instead, therefore, of proceeding to a critical vote, the Court resorted to the old device of appointing a Committee of conference. This Committee, with Dr. Alex. MacEwen [1] as Convener, was instructed to meet with Mr. Ferguson, and other parties in the Case, and do their best to secure a satisfactory issue.

But now occurred a curious episode. Ferguson had already had more than enough of Committees. He had found "conferences" with them painful in themselves and profitless in their issue. He therefore wrote to Dr. MacEwen the following letter:

"DALKEITH, 17*th May* 1871.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of your kind note informing me of the appointment of a Committee of Conference on the matter of the second protest and appeal before the Synod yesterday, and beg sincerely to thank you for the friendly expressions it contains. It has been my earnest desire throughout the whole of this inquiry to defer to the utmost point in order to give satisfaction as to the soundness of my theological views. I am very sorry that after a long and painful experience of the apparently unavoidable tendency of mere conversation on such matters to drift into indefiniteness rather than into clearness, I am thoroughly convinced of the inadequacy of that method, and it is on this ground chiefly that I feel myself compelled, with all respect, to express rather to yourself, as convener of the Committee, in the form of the present

[1] Father of the late Dr. A. R. MacEwen, Professor of Church History in New College, Edinburgh.

communication, my concurrence in all that Dr. Davidson has said. I trust you will give me the benefit of your most charitable construction in this particular, for it will add greatly to the grief I already endure if I am suspected of cherishing the slightest disrespect of any arrangement of the Supreme Court of the Church. I have no hesitation in giving a direct and formal adhesion to the statements and explanations of Dr. Davidson. In the three positions contained in his speech, with all that he said, I concur without hesitation; and I earnestly trust this may be deemed an adequate guarantee as to my soundness in the faith.—I remain yours, FERGUS FERGUSON.

"Rev. Dr. MacEwen,
Convener of Committee of Conference."

This letter, which was really a courteous refusal to meet the Committee, was read at its first meeting and caused a good deal of concern. The position was indeed a very awkward one. It was recognised that Ferguson was within his rights in declining to be interviewed or to answer questions. He was not on trial, for his Presbytery had not seen fit to proceed against him; and he had nothing to do with the appeal which was before the Synod. He was, therefore, quite entitled to stand aloof, and to ask the Supreme Court to proceed to judgment on the evidence already before it. But, on the other hand, there was agreement that it would be a very unfortunate thing if the Committee were compelled to report that they had failed in their mission of peace, through the unwillingness of the "heretic" to confer with them. It was perceived that such a

course would certainly mean trouble, and possibly a repetition of the Morison fiasco, with all its sad results. In these circumstances the Committee adjourned, after having deputed Dr. Eadie and Dr. Cairns to go down to Dalkeith and reason with the reluctant brother. This errand they fulfilled with the tactfulness to be expected of such men; and the issue was that Ferguson returned with them to Edinburgh, and appeared at the adjourned discussion. What else, indeed, could a young minister have done when approached by personages like Eadie and Cairns? Ferguson, at least, was quite unable to resist their request; for he was ever the most obliging of men, and the most amenable to friendly persuasion. One would hesitate, however, to affirm that he never in after years regretted his compliance, nor ever thought that his first resolve had been, after all, the wiser. For he was led by this conference into a most unexpected and equivocal position. On his way to the committee-room he passed through lobbies where members of the Synod were gathered in groups of eager consultation; and the ordeal that awaited him exceeded all that he had feared. Two long and weary hours were passed in manifold discussion: he was beset by the warnings of the wise and the contendings of the learned; he was exposed, as it were, to the fire of all the heavy artillery of the Church. In the end, also, he appears to have been reduced to a state of bewilderment and to have been carried whither he would not. For he was actually induced at last to sign four propositions which seemed

to be decidedly out of tune with much that he had formerly maintained. They were as follows :

"1. That all who shall ultimately be saved were chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world.

"2. That all who are saved are accepted of God, 'by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,' at or before the time of their death ; and that none dying unsaved will, after death, have an opportunity of obtaining salvation.

"3. That whatever new revelations of Christ or of the truth are made after death to the saved are made, not to free them from sin, but to increase their knowledge and blessedness.

"4. That, notwithstanding the inability of the will through sin, as taught in our Confession, unbelievers are fully answerable for their rejection of the offer of salvation which the gospel makes to them."

These propositions certainly do, as already suggested, at least *appear* to be inconsistent with some of Ferguson's contentions. But it is possible that this apparent contradiction is due rather to the orthodox ring of their phrases than to their essential meaning. It is to be remembered that he had not at this time formulated that theory of Universal Restitution which he held in later years. Also, it must be noted that he never taught the doctrine of future Probation. Probation, in his view, implied an embodied form of existence ; but the Intermediate State was a condition of pure mentality wherein the soul had no corporeal organ. In that state, therefore, there could be no probation. All

that could be imparted to the soul between death and resurrection was light, understanding, knowledge. If these things be remembered the four propositions will be seen to be *consistent* with Ferguson's teaching, though not a suitable exposition of it. He never would have drawn up these statements himself, but when they were presented to him he could accept them as a partial statement of truth. He also guarded himself from misunderstanding by accompanying his acceptance of them with the assertion :

"*I still hold all the interpretations of Scripture given by me from the pulpit, and understand that my liberty, as a minister of the gospel, to speak according to my own light, conscience, and sense of responsibility, remains unimpaired.*"

Still, it remains true that Ferguson was quite commonly held to have shown weakness at this time ; and he was often reproached with it in after years. It is certain, also, that he believed himself to have been wronged in being required to sign these articles. This is made evident by a reference which he made to the matter during his trial in 1878 :

"A committee of the Church on that occasion, without any proper warrant, obliged me to put my name to those statements ; and, although I had given my adhesion as an honest man to the Confession (and that was regarded as sufficient for other brethren), they required me to adhibit my name to four new dogmas formulated by a committee of the Church without consulting the Church ; so that they succeeded in

condensing the essence of orthodoxy into those four propositions. So far, then, from being reproached as regards my orthodoxy, I stand here as a man whose orthodoxy is better guaranteed than any other minister's in the Church. I don't know that there is another minister in broad Scotland who has his orthodoxy secured by a special deed of Synod."

In this way the Dalkeith Case had an end; for the four propositions formed the basis of an agreement which was accepted by the Synod with the eagerness natural to an assembly that had seen itself confronted with a painful crisis. The case has passed long since into the region of forgotten things; but it created much disturbance in its day, and even threatened to have stern results. The public interest in it was very keen, as was evidenced by the comments of the daily Press, by the appearance of many pamphlets and lampoons, by references in speeches delivered throughout the country, and by the audiences which crowded to witness its closing scenes. We cannot fail, also, to perceive the curious features it presents: some of them petty and some of them great; some of them, no doubt, characteristically Scottish, but all of them eminently human. The worthy elder with his box, his pugnacity, his equal zeal for orthodox theology and for the smallest habits of congregational custom; the Presbyters, seeking to harmonise brotherly kindness with Calvinistic fidelity, fond of argument and cross-examination, but unwilling to invoke the rigours of law; the successive Committees, meant to be "friendly" but prone to be

oppressive; Dr. Cairns and Dr. Eadie, great men in the religious world, going down to Dalkeith, anxious to serve the Church but anxious also to save their younger brother; the imposition of the four propositions as "sufficient but necessary," an action tyrannical in principle but peaceful in effect: all of these are typical of the qualities which render Scottish ecclesiastical history so parochial and yet so broad, so very individual and yet so very "churchly," so homely and democratic, while at the same time so severe and so insistent on authority.

Moreover, the Dalkeith Case had important theological significance and wide historical relations. It marked the first appearance of eschatological problems in the sphere of Scottish ecclesiastical life. It meant also the reassertion in the Presbyterian Communion of the catholic belief in the Intermediate State. It is easy to say that this belief is of no meaning or value, just as it is easy to say anything else that is thoughtless. But the inherent logic of the ancient Christian faith is not thus to be annulled. The truth is that Ferguson, in raising the question of the state of souls immediately after death, showed his characteristic sense of a theological situation and his responsiveness to the influences of his time. In 1871 the Church was on the threshold of a decade which was to witness an exhaustive discussion of all the questions of eschatology. A decision of the Privy Council in 1864 had made the dogma of Eternal Punishment an open question in the

Church of England; in the very year of Ferguson's Trial Dean Plumptre delivered in St. Paul's his sermon on "The Spirits in Prison"; in 1878 Cox published his famous book, *Salvator Mundi*, and in 1879 Farrar issued his *Eternal Hope*; Pusey replied in the same year with his noble treatise, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment*, and his doctrine, as then set forth, was nearly the same as that which Ferguson foreshadowed in 1871. The latter was thus at that time the exponent of a wide movement of thought, and the precursor of later theological developments in which he was himself to bear a toilsome part. If these historical circumstances be kept in view the Dalkeith Case will be seen to possess an interest and importance which is not to be measured by the somewhat vague and disconnected nature of the speculations with which it was immediately concerned.

We may conjecture, indeed, that the graver elements in the situation were clearly enough perceived by those who, at that time, were leaders of the United Presbyterian Church. The clergymen who contended with Ferguson in the battle of the committee-room, and led his reluctant feet along the path of concession, were men of stature and of wisdom, not easily interested in trivial things. Dr. MacEwen, a fine scholar, an eminent preacher and a skilful man of affairs; Dr. Harper, logical Calvinist and most courtly gentleman; Dr. Cairns, the last great representative of the old conservative school; Dr. Eadie, abundant in labours

and large in heart and mind: these were all worthy of the trust that was reposed in them, and the time and labour they bestowed upon this Case show their estimate of its import. Their policy was indeed open to criticism, though their motives were alike sincere and unselfish; and it must be confessed that their four propositions were a dispiriting piece of work. They bear the stamp of compromise, and their self-contradictions are patent. Of those defects, of course, the authors of these formulæ must have been well aware. Obviously, their object was, not to achieve a harmonious theological statement, but to set forth the actual faith of the Church without attempting to reconcile its logical oppositions. In adopting this course, also, it must be agreed that they were only following the example of ecclesiastical leaders in every crisis in the history of every Communion.

As to Ferguson's own action throughout the whole affair, it was to his praise and was entirely characteristic of the man: lofty in its aims, able in its conduct, conciliatory in its spirit, and aggressive only under extreme and long-continued provocation. No doubt, the sudden onset of the prosecution in 1871 took him at a disadvantage, unprepared. No doubt, also, the mystical type of his thought and the unusual phraseology which he employed rendered him liable to be misunderstood, confused his friends and annoyed his foes. Nevertheless, he showed a true perception of the problems which then awaited solution; he was a faithful witness to his

Church of things that it needed to remember; he stood with courage, almost alone, against the imposing forces of an organised host and an old tradition. In this his earliest fight he deserves, therefore, the sympathy of generous minds and the gratitude of later generations. To make for him a lower claim than this would not be consistent either with knowledge or with that fairness of judgment which is the only security of truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOVEMENT FOR CREED REVISION.

We have seen that Fergus Ferguson entered in 1871 upon the first stage of his career as a theological reformer. It remains now to describe the second phase of his activities, which began in 1877. If this book were a biography it would be necessary to consider at some length the record of the intervening years, for they formed an important period in the life of the man. But as the main concern of our narrative is to tell the story of a religious movement, we must confine ourselves at this point to a few words of explanation, such as are necessary to the understanding of subsequent events.

It is significant of the temper of mind prevailing among the laity of the Church during the '70's that the reputation for heresy, which attached to Ferguson after the Dalkeith Case, did not in the least lessen his popularity as a preacher. Indeed, his fame as a pulpit orator rapidly increased after 1871, and he received during the following years many invitations to become pastor of important charges, one of which is now known

as Palmerston Place United Free Church, Edinburgh. He remained in Dalkeith, however, until 1876, when he became minister of Queen's Park Church, Glasgow, a young but already powerful congregation in the attractive modern suburb of Crosshill. There his success was immediate; and it was also permanent. For his people supported him with passionate loyalty throughout all his ecclesiastical troubles, and their attachment to his personality and preaching remained unaltered 'mid all the changes and chances of the later days. A remarkable proof of this is to be found in the determined attitude of the congregation at the time of the Trial in 1878. Sir William Lorimer told the present writer that the Queen's Park people, during that crisis, had made all arrangements for secession in the event of Ferguson being condemned. And the following authoritative statement attests the truth of this: "Had the decision of the Synod been different, one of the purest intellects would have been cast out, and one of the most flourishing congregations would probably have been lost to the Church." [1]

In the meantime, Ferguson's theological labours went on. The system of thought which, as we have seen, was already in process of growth during his earlier ministry was developed and ripened throughout the time which followed his encounter with the Edinburgh

[1] *Our Jubilee Book* (1917), by H. A. Stirling, p. 45. It may be noted that when the Presbytery libelled Mr. Ferguson, the Congregation increased his stipend!

Presbytery. Neither the increasing demands upon his preaching gifts nor the cares incidental to a new charge were allowed to distract him at all from his work of quiet thought. And the result was that when he started his campaign for Creed Revision in 1877 he was prepared to confront the Calvinistic structure of belief with an opposing system of his own. In this second conflict with accepted dogma he joined issue, no longer on the narrow ground of one particular doctrine, but on the broad contention that the Confessional teaching required to be corrected in its whole extent, from its presentation of the Divine character to its account of the final destinies of mankind.

I.

The United Presbyterian Church, at the close of the Dalkeith Case, occupied a theological position which may be described as critical. Her relation to the Confession of Faith was anomalous, self-contradictory, not long to be endured by an honourable Community. On the one hand, all ministers and elders were required to receive the Confession as embodying the sense in which they understood the Scriptures. But, on the other hand, they were supposed to disown all "intolerant and persecuting principles," such as seemed to be implied in the Westminster doctrine as to the duties of "the Civil Magistrate": also, they were expected to hold the Calvinistic tenet of Election, and at the same

time to believe that the Atonement conveyed some sort of benefit to all mankind, and that the offer of salvation in Christ was freely made to every man. This latter position was, as we have seen, partly the result of the Atonement Controversy and was not without a religious basis; but it was clearly illogical, and it was puzzling to men who found a more consistent doctrine set forth in the official Creed. The difficulty which was thus inherent in the Church's position had been further emphasised, as well as illustrated, by the document which Ferguson was required to accept in 1871. It begins, as we have seen, with the statement that "all who shall ultimately be saved were chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world": which is the doctrine of Election in the most absolute form. It then proceeds to assert that "none dying unsaved will, after death, have an opportunity of obtaining salvation": which apparently excludes from hope of redemption great masses of mankind. It, finally, affirms that, "spite of the inability of the will through sin, *as taught in our Confession*, unbelievers are fully answerable for their rejection of the offer of salvation which the gospel makes to them": which signifies that men whose wills are enslaved are yet as responsible for their acts as if their wills were free, and that they are able to accept a salvation which in fact cannot be theirs unless they are numbered with those who were "chosen of God before the foundation of the world." Such is the formula which was presented to Fergus Ferguson

for his acceptance as "sufficient but necessary"; and it certainly exhibits with wonderful completeness the perplexities of the theology it expounds. The ecclesiastical situation which required the production of such a formula was evidently one of extreme embarrassment, and one that could not last.

II.

It is from this historical point of view alone that one is disposed to assert the importance of these Four Propositions which were the product of the Dalkeith prosecution. They have no speculative merits and display no felicities of expression. They were not the fruit of careful deliberation, nor were they an essay in creed-making; they were simply a provisional and rather clumsy device for meeting the needs of a moment and settling an individual case. Indeed, they were not regarded with pride by anyone that was concerned in the matter; and their authors showed no desire to keep them in remembrance. The present writer has found only one reference to them in the debates of subsequent years; and that was made hastily in the heat of controversy. It may be said with truth that they were hurried into a merited oblivion with a dispatch and thoroughness that excites wonder as well as admiration. Nevertheless, they remain in the records of history; and it is worth our while to call them forth from their modest retirement in order that they may

witness to us of the actual state of theological opinion at the date of their birth, in a Communion which was as free as any other of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches.

But something more than this must be said about these four little propositions. For there was one man in whose mind they remained as a lively and painful memory, and also as an incentive to further thought and action. That man was Fergus Ferguson. We have already indicated, to some extent, how he came to be able to accept these formulæ, and we shall see later in what terms he must have interpreted them. But we have noted, also, that he assented to them under strong constraint, subject to vital reservation, and with a sense of being unjustly treated. A knowledge of his mentality enables us to assert that while he signed the document set before him, he regarded its palpable inconsistencies with intellectual scorn and that he believed it to be a mere ecclesiastical makeshift, designed to secure a period of peace. Moreover, his experience in this matter undoubtedly opened his eyes to the perilous position in which the Church stood, as related to its Creed. He saw that the custom of requiring the clergy to subscribe to the Westminster Confession meant, and would increasingly mean, an intolerable bondage for honest minds. He perceived that so long as this practice remained there could be no end to ambiguity of thought, to doubtful ingenuities of interpretation, and to such humiliating and illogical

compromises as that in which he had been constrained to have a most unwilling share. And thus he finally became convinced that the only policy which could in the end save the Church, and conserve the truth, was to set aside the Confession and proceed to a complete restatement of the Faith. Hence it was that, after some years of constant and hard thinking, he, in April 1877, submitted to the Glasgow Presbytery an overture praying the Supreme Court to undertake a radical revision of the Creed. If, then, we bear these things in mind, we see how important the Dalkeith Case really was, though it has been so strangely overlooked by ecclesiastical writers. That case issued in the episode of the Four Propositions, and the episode of the Four Propositions was the direct cause of Ferguson's movement for theological reform. This movement meant for its author a weary prosecution, much sacrifice, labour, and pain; and it failed to secure the best that he had desired. Nevertheless, it led to the Declaratory Act of 1879, and so did ultimately achieve a real measure of emancipation, not only for Ferguson's own Communion, but for all the Presbyterian world.

III.

Of course, we do not claim that this movement owed either its origin or its issue entirely to the solitary reflection, the courage and the conviction of one man; for its ultimate source lay deep in the spirit of the age,

and it was mediated by the peculiar genius of a whole Church. No theological advance is ever accomplished solely by the efforts of an individual. It is the product of many historical and logical forces which work together during a long period in the life of a community, gradually leavening and changing the common thoughts of men, and coming at last in the fulness of time to outward and visible manifestation. And, although this manifestation is always completed through the talent and the labour of one or two chosen minds, these are little more than the organs and instruments of an impersonal spiritual power. It is, further, to be admitted that the United Presbyterian Church was plainly appointed, by its specific qualities and experiences, to be the agent of creed-reform. There were quite evident reasons why that Church should feel the necessity of such reform sooner and more acutely than either of the other two great branches of Scottish Presbyterianism. The National Church of Scotland, like all ancient establishments, was strongly possessed of the historical temper and attitude. The Confession was, for it, the symbol of its venerable tradition, the chosen Standard under which it had marched through the storm and stress of many generations, the charter of its privileges, the emblem of its high place among the Reformed Communions of the world. Hence, the clergy regarded it as a witness to the general testimony of their Church, rather than as the expression of each man's individual faith; and the theological liberals

among them considered the act of subscription to be, in the main, a mere genuflexion to history and a pledge that they accepted the principles of the Reformation and were true to the national habit of thought. Some of them went further even than this, and spoke of the Creed with an easy and detached tolerance which showed a deeper alienation than any fiery invective could have done. This mood is illustrated in the advice given to parents as to the religious education of their children, by Dr. John Service: "Carefully avoid the Shorter Catechism, and to the highest shelf in your libraries consign the Confession of Faith."

The Free Church also shared very largely, in this matter, the attitude of the Establishment; and it was, besides, the most closely knit ecclesiastical organism in Scotland, having its strength in a system of ordered authority which rested securely on the Westminster Confession. And it is evident that a Society like this, with its intense Church-consciousness and its instinct for unity and law, did not supply an atmosphere that was favourable to solitary revolts or individual impugnments of the Creed. Of course it would not be true to say that there was in the Free Church, even during the '70's, no dissatisfaction with the terms of subscription which then obtained. Indeed, the opposite of this is indicated in a passage which occurs in one of Ferguson's speeches:

"Dr. Rainy, speaking the other day at the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England, referred to the

ecclesiastical state of Scotland, which he characterised as *perfectly ridiculous*. The explanation of all the movements, meetings, and speeches of an ecclesiastical kind in Scotland just now was the absurdity of the position. Everybody was uneasy, because everybody was in a position more or less absurd." Moreover, Professor Salmond of Aberdeen wrote, in 1877, that "but for the spirit of the Church," as distinct from the Confession, "subscription would be a moral impossibility and quite intolerable." Nevertheless, the fact remains that the great Communion of which Dr. Rainy was the leader was but little disturbed by theological unrest of the type which we have at present in mind. Even Robertson Smith, at the time of his trial, professed no dissatisfaction with the Confession.

Concerning the United Presbyterian Church, however, something different must be said. It was, indeed, perfectly true to its name, inasmuch as it was strongly "Presbyterian"; and its Supreme Court, the Synod, exercised unquestioned authority within its borders. Also, its affairs were regulated by enactments which were, in some directions, more definite and particular than those of its sister Communions. Nevertheless, it was not so much a Federal Union as a Confederacy of Congregations. Each of these Congregations possessed, as a rule, its own property, and it always supported its own ordinances, receiving help from central funds only when it was too weak to discharge unaided its separate obligations. Hence, its essential Presbyterianism was

tinctured with an element akin to Independency ; it was more individualistic than its sisters, less highly organised, and less historical in temper. It had, of course, an historical sense and tradition of its own, such as is expressed with so much grace and charm in the writings of Dr. John Ker. It had its share in the past of the undivided Kirk and of " the auld Scottish nation," and in type and temper it was singularly true to its race. But the memories which it cherished most were not fitted to encourage the spirit of conformity, nor were they hostile to the exercise of the private judgment. It held in peculiar honour the records of the old heroic days, and it had striven gallantly for a long time to maintain adherence to the Covenants. Its distinctive characteristics, also, had been evolved through a stern and stormy experience. Though its chief originators, the Erskines, Wilson, and Moncreiff, had belonged to the landed class, it had found its main support at first among the humble people, the hardy peasants, the industrious tradesmen, those who followed the plough and wrought with chisel and hammer and spade. Its earliest places of worship had possessed no beauty that men should desire them, and were erected often by the free labour, and always through the personal sacrifice, of poverty-laden folk. Its story, also, had been, during many years, one of strife and division, protestings and testimonies and dissents. And all the growth and expansion of the Church had been achieved in spite of many disabilities, social contempt, and not a little

ecclesiastical arrogance. In all this there was, of course, much to foster an individualistic and liberty-loving temper, which displayed itself sometimes in forms that were not altogether lovely.

It is true that, long before the period of Ferguson's activities, the United Presbyterian Church had outlived the troubles and battles of the earlier day, had secured for itself both respect and influence, and held, especially, a predominant position in Glasgow and the West.[1] It is true, also, that, in the process of attaining these things, it had lost some of its earlier characteristics, and that its town and city congregations differed little, in type of belief and worship, from those of the Established Church. None the less, the marks of its origin and of its strenuous youth were still upon it: the fiery energies that had of old been spent in divisive struggles and contentions still remained, though they showed themselves now in far-reaching missionary enterprise, in pioneer work of various kinds, in a militant Voluntaryism, and also in a rapidly increasing tendency to freedom of belief. This latter development was very marked among the educated laity, especially of the younger generation, among divinity students and the junior clergy; and it was this which chiefly menaced the reign of the Confession. For United Presbyterians, being as we have seen more individual-

[1] Cf. Cunningham, *Church History of Scotland* (1882), ii. 311. "And now, after more than a century, it flourishes as a mighty tree, under the broad shadows of which hundreds of thousands find a shelter."

istic than their brethren in other Communions, were less disposed to regard the ancient Creed in a purely historical light and far more apt to consider it a personal expression of belief. Subscription to it, therefore, was more burdensome to them than to some others, and pressed more heavily on the conscience of each separate subscriber. The effect of this was in many ways deplorable. An increasing number of ministers resented the strictness of their ordination vows, many able students were from time to time lost to the service of the Church, and it became more and more difficult to persuade intelligent men to accept the eldership. If, then, we give due weight to all these things, we see that this particular branch of the great Presbyterian Fellowship was plainly called to lead the way in the direction of Creed Revision. Necessity was laid upon it in the matter. Sooner or later, in one fashion or another, it was ordained to do this work.

IV.

We recognise, then, that when Fergus Ferguson presented his overture to the Glasgow Presbytery, in 1877, he was in a sense only the instrument of his Church's destiny, was only supplying the occasion for that being immediately done which, in any case, must some day have come to pass. But, none the less on this account, do we claim for him especial credit. It must needs be that changes come, but there is honour

to him through whom they come. When we say that a man is the instrument of Necessity, we do not mean that he is an instrument as a sword or a hammer is: a dead thing, lying passive in the hand of Fate. He freely chooses to fulfil his part; were he to refuse his vocation it would pass from him. If the man is dependent for his power on the fitness of the time and season, the time and season without the man go sterile and powerless by. Great forces of thought may be like a leaderless army which stands motionless and futile through critical moments for the lack of a voice to set it on the march. The hour of destiny often strikes unheeded, because there is no one waiting and listening for its advent, and ready to accept its summons. And so it is impossible to say how long the reforming movement might have been delayed, how much might have been lost to the Church, how many years more might have been spent in timid and temporising talk, if Fergus Ferguson had not stood forth to call the alarm, to sound the assault, to say to his brethren—The hour is come; arise and act.

In making this claim one does not forget that George Gilfillan and David Macrae were unsparing critics of the Confession, and that the latter of these, by his extreme audacity, finally brought upon himself the ultimate ecclesiastical penalty. But the Gilfillan thunder was not accompanied by lightning, and Macrae, in spite of his many gifts, literary and oratorical, was not supposed to be a scientific theologian, and enjoyed

but little influence among the clergy. Ferguson, on the other hand, was a systematic thinker, a man of philosophical mind and strong dogmatic convictions. His contendings had their roots in metaphysics, and were logically related to an ordered scheme of thought. He possessed, moreover, a gift of subtle dialectic and of winning and stirring speech; and his address had the weight and authority that are derived from a habit of brooding meditation on the higher problems of faith, from long and patient vigils of mental labour and devotion. Hence the peculiar respect and affection that he inspired, hence his especial fitness for the task to which he set his hand. Hence, also, our justification for the claim that to his initiation was especially due the measure of enfranchisement which was gained for all the Presbyterian Communions through the Declaratory Act of 1879.

We must reiterate, however, that the production of such a cautious instrument as the Declaratory Act was not the object he had in view when he started his campaign, nor was it ever according to his mind. He regarded it, indeed, to the end of his life, as a merely temporary expedient, useful enough but somewhat contemptible. What he desired was, not a relaxation of the terms on which the Confession was subscribed, but an entire restatement of the Creed. And this was the task to which he invited the Synod in the overture which he submitted to his Presbytery. It is true that this overture had but a short life and never reached

its destination; it was like the call of a challenging trumpet which dies in echoes away. But, like the trumpet-call, it did its work, for it aroused the Church to discharge in some degree its appointed duty. A more moderate blast might have failed to awaken; a less provocative sound might not have inspired to war. If Ferguson had not proposed a radical reform it is possible that no reform at all would have been gained.

V.

As to this matter of the overture, indeed, a certain amount of misunderstanding has arisen. In MacEwen's classical biography of Principal Cairns it is stated that the question of Creed Revision came before the Synod through the action of "two young ministers, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Macrae, who approached the Supreme Court in proper form with a definite request that the Subordinate Standards, as the Westminster documents are technically termed, should be revised."[1] But this account of things is not wholly accurate. It is true that Macrae did present to the Synod such a proposal as Dr. MacEwen indicates, and supported it personally in a very skilful speech. But Ferguson's overture never got beyond the Glasgow Presbytery, and he himself took no part in the Synodical proceedings. He, in truth, did not desire to present "an individual and solitary" petition to the ultimate tribunal; his

[1] Pp. 665–666.

desire was that the Presbytery should make his overture its own, and so lend it the weight that would naturally belong to a petition presented by the largest subordinate Court in the Church. But the debate that followed his speech soon convinced him that his hope would be disappointed. He found himself confronted by two separate parties, both hostile to his proposal. The first of these, ably led by Dr. David Young, maintained that the time was inopportune for any attempt of the kind suggested; they also objected to the theology expounded by Mr. Ferguson, and argued that it was well to adhere meantime to the present state of things, which after all secured a good deal of freedom, rather than submit to the bondage of a new Creed more binding than the old historical Confession. The second party, headed by Dr. Joseph Brown and Dr. Joseph Leckie, shared Mr. Ferguson's desire that the work of Creed Revision should be undertaken forthwith; but they thought that he had gone too far in his proposals, and were content to move that the Presbytery request the Synod to take into immediate consideration the whole question of the Church's relation to its Creed. This latter motion was carried, by a bare majority of one; and Ferguson then allowed his own proposal to be dropped; for he had no wish, as has been said, to proceed alone on a hopeless adventure.

This is the true story of the fate which befell Ferguson's overture; and it certainly involved, for

him, a very great disappointment. He had, however, no ground of complaint against the Presbytery. It had not done what he wished, but it had done something. He had not secured the end he had in view; but he had been regularly and courteously met, and had been fairly beaten in fair debate. Unfortunately, however, the Synod of 1877 treated him in a way which nearly drove him out of the Church. When the various overtures anent Creed Revision were presented to the Venerable Court, considerable difference of opinion made itself manifest.[1] It is true that there was absolute unanimity as to the abstract principle that the Subordinate Standards might be, and ought to be, revised from time to time. But some, like Dr. Young, thought that the hour was inopportune for any definite action; others, like Dr. James Brown, adopted an attitude similar to that of the liberals in the Church of Scotland, desiring that the Confession should be left alone but that the terms of subscription to it should be relaxed; and yet another party, led by Drs. Cairns and Calderwood, proposed that a Committee should be appointed to consider the whole question at issue and report in the following year. This latter party was the predominant one, and its policy was adopted by the Synod. The motion which was thus carried was drafted, as to its main clause, by Dr. Cairns, but it was presented by Ferguson's old antagonist, Principal Harper. As

[1] The overtures were three in number; for there was one from Perth Presbytery, besides the two already mentioned.

submitted by this venerable theologian it began with a long preamble which expressed the unchanged adherence of the Church to the Confession: surely a strange preface to a proposal that purported to secure impartial inquiry. This preamble, further, contained "a strong condemnation" of "the conduct of those persons who, having solemnly professed to give their assent to these Standards, do notwithstanding indulge in denouncing them." Now, this condemnation was on two separate grounds regrettable. In the first place, it was unreasonable, inasmuch as it is plainly impossible to secure a change in any Creed without criticising it. In the second place, it had a directly personal bearing, since it referred, of course, to Mr. Macrae and Mr. Ferguson. This was placed beyond doubt by the Principal himself in his speech, and also by others who took part in the debate; for all of these, except Dr. Joseph Brown and Dr. Calderwood, deplored the criticism to which the "venerable Confession" had been subjected, and reflected more or less explicitly on the conduct of Macrae and Ferguson. In this there was manifest injustice, since these public reprimands were administered to men whose action the Synod was itself about to endorse, in a measure, by taking steps which were due to their demands.

Macrae, indeed, took the matter lightly; for he was a theological free-lance, delighting in battle, having small respect for ecclesiastical Courts, and recking little of their rebukes. His temper was shown by his extremely

clever speech in reply to his critics, good-tempered, witty, and sometimes dignified in its remonstrance. Thus, referring to the accusation that he was no theologian, he said: "If I have spoken the truth it will stand, though it has been said by me; and if some of those who have spoken have uttered error it will not stand, even though spoken by older and wiser men than I." Very different was the effect of the Synod's strictures on the mind of Ferguson. He justly believed that these strictures were directed chiefly against himself; indeed, both his overture and his speech in proposing it were quoted during the debate. And this was peculiarly unfair, since neither overture nor speech was before the Court or relevant to the discussion. Nor was this all; for there was a palpable indication of the official attitude towards him in the fact that, although he had initiated the whole movement for reform, his name was not on the list of those originally proposed as members of the Revision Committee. This was an injustice so palpable that the Synod, with its accustomed sense of fair play, insisted on the omission being rectified; so that Ferguson had, after all, a share in the work of reviewing the Creed, acting always in concert with those who desired the largest obtainable measure of freedom. Nevertheless, the rebuke which the Court had, in effect, administered to him made so painful an impression on his sensitive spirit that he took the action which is described in the following minute of Queen's Park Session:

"*May* 30 (at close of forenoon service).—The Moderator intimated that he felt the Synod had by their unanimous finding anent the overtures for the revision of the subordinate standards strongly condemned his conduct in the efforts he had made towards the furtherance of truth, that his fidelity to Christ and to his ordination vows had been called in question, and his conduct strongly condemned by the Synod; and as said decision left him under grave suspicion and fettered him in his utterances as a minister of the Gospel, he felt that his position was an untenable one, and intimated his intention to resign his position as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church. He further expressed his great sorrow at being compelled by a strong sense of duty to make this painful announcement, but as it was impossible to reconcile his own convictions with a loyal submission to the commands of the Church, he felt no other course was open to him."

A feeling of profound grief pervaded the Session on hearing the above intimation, and the Moderator was warmly and lovingly urged to reconsider his decision and to pause before taking any steps in the matter until he had further conferred with the Session.

"*June* 5.—In connection with a statement made by the Moderator at a previous meeting as to the difficulty he felt regarding the Synodical decision, he made a further statement to the effect that he had been induced to refrain from taking any active steps in the matter in the meantime, partly on the ground that he had received assurance from many esteemed brethren in the ministry that he ought not so severely to interpret the decision, and chiefly for the purpose of allowing the Presbytery, in the first instance, to satisfy itself as to his soundness in the faith."

The unhappy episode thus recorded was referred to in one of Ferguson's later speeches; and the terms he then employed showed how great had been his suffering:

"The Presbytery rejected my overture, and now it is making the speech which I delivered in its support the basis of the present investigation. But both the overture and the speech were virtually included in the recent decision of the Synod anent the subordinate standards. Both my conduct and sentiments were not only embraced in the condemnation then unanimously passed, but they were actually made the subject of discussion. The rejected overture itself was printed even among the papers of the Synod. The conduct of the movers for doctrinal reform was characterised as a pretence, and condemned as something akin to perjury. The imputation was made that the doctrines of grace had been assailed or imperilled; and the whole was triumphantly concluded with a copious castigation of mockery and sarcasm, amid bursts of laughter and rounds of applause. I dare say some people thought that decision a thorough extinction of the delinquents who had dared to appeal from the subordinate standards to the Word of God. That certainly was my own feeling, in so far as my connection with the United Presbyterian Church was concerned; and I said so to my session of Queen's Park. I remained sorrowfully under the conviction, for some time, that I had simply nothing further to do with the denomination. Of course, I had been condemned without a trial, without proof of any kind, with a libel hanging over me at the time ostensibly founded on the same matter, and without even the opportunity being given to me of offering a word of explanation. Perhaps that is the reason why the Presbytery have resolved to resuscitate the matter, that I may have the benefit of a fair trial, after having been so ignominiously hanged without one. The only

objection I am disposed to make to this resuscitation is, that in the event of my having to be hanged again, some would, on the whole, prefer that I had not been disturbed or the public troubled with an apparition, leading them to exclaim, 'Alas! poor ghost!' However, now that the matter has been permitted to revisit the glimpses of the moon, let us hope that the doleful shades around us may give place to a brighter day."

The tone of this statement undoubtedly implies a good deal of natural and well-warranted resentment; and the whole incident is a painful one to remember. It is necessary, however, to recall it, for it reveals the temper of the time, and it shows that, in the Church as in the world, the rights of the individual are apt to be overlooked in the supposed interests of a general expediency. Moreover, it marked a most critical point in Ferguson's career; and, especially, it exhibited certain qualities which were characteristic of the man. His action in proposing to demit his charge proves that he was not unduly anxious to retain his position in the United Presbyterian Communion, and that he was not prepared to compromise his personal honour for the sake of his ecclesiastical status. These are things, indeed, which required no demonstration for those who knew him well; since his friends were perfectly aware that, while he was a loyal servant of his own denomination, he was by no means a blind admirer of it or a supporter of its Disestablishment policy. Also, his intimates never doubted that a rigid and punctilious integrity was one of his strongest qualities. But many

who did not have personal acquaintance with him were puzzled by the concessions which he was said to have made in the course of both his heresy trials, and some of these, as we shall see, openly accused him of cowardice and weakness. These charges, which were keenly felt by Dr. Ferguson, remain written in the records of his Case and in the files of the contemporary Press ; and so it is well to note the incident of 1877 ; for it is final evidence that the motives which inspired his conduct were never those of selfishness or fear. Surely the man who had once publicly declared his resolve to surrender his office and his career, had done all he could to show that he was no craven and no weakling, nor one of those who sell the truth to serve the hour. His own answer to those who imputed dishonesty to him, on the ground that he attacked the Creed which he had signed, was characteristic : " Of course, people who call the Confession in question are not honest men ! The honest labourer is he who keeps the Confession wrapped up in a napkin, and on the day of account gives back to his Master precisely what he got on the day of his ordination, saying, ' There thou hast that is thine.' But those that drudge and toil to turn their one talent into ten, are merely troublers of Israel, and ought to be ' extruded ' from the Church."

VI.

On the side of the authorities and of the Conservative party in the Church, it must be confessed, on the other hand, that Ferguson's speech when he submitted his overture was of a very polemical type, and fitted to cause some measure of alarm. Indeed, no such arraignment of the Confession had ever before been heard in a Presbyterian Court; even the attacks delivered by MacLeod Campbell in 1830–1831 are not to be compared with it for comprehensive invective. The Westminster Divines were condemned for their teaching as to God, the Universe, Man, Christ, the Church, and the Bible. "Their whole account of God" was said to be "merely a catalogue of disconnected epithets, without proper beginning, middle, or end," which "might be extended to any length so long as there were adjectives in the language expressive of any kind of excellence." Their doctrine of the Trinity was described as "tritheism on a basis of pantheism." Their statement as to total depravity was declared to imply that fallen men had no longer any spiritual nature; and their theory of the two Covenants was characterised as "dead and wooden to the core." Generally, the Confession was "deliberately impeached" as "no exhibition of the Divine order of the universe, but an exhibition rather, at least in part, of the disorder of the human intellect." "Religion," added the speaker, "religion is the most living of all verities, and the most beautiful of all

spirits. Why, then, should it be doomed to wear the shackles of a grim and ungainly past, and to grind for ever in the prison-house of a gloomy and dead metaphysic?" Altogether this was a speech which invited retaliation. It was not a deliverance of the judicial and compromising type to which Church Courts are accustomed; it was not what is euphemistically called "statesmanlike." It was like a call to battle, or the opening volley in an armed rebellion; and we cannot wonder that it was met by an answering challenge, and that the conservatives did not withhold their fire.

There can be no doubt, of course, that the tone of this address, and the strong expressions it contained, truly represented the convictions and sentiments of a multitude. The present generation can have little conception or understanding of the passionate dislike of the Confessional system which possessed the minds of many who, in the '70's, were numbered among the older clergy. The present writer has himself heard such men, at a somewhat later period, speak of the Calvinism of the Creed with stern indignation as a tyranny which had oppressed their youth and cheated them of the fulness of joy which dwells in the Christian faith. It was an easy matter for such as J. A. Froude to pronounce academic eulogiums on Calvinism; for they saw it only in the light of its historical achievements, and never even entertained the notion of accepting its dogmas. It was far otherwise with those who

had been educated under its reign, had felt it a burden all their early days, and had won their freedom from it at a great price of spiritual and intellectual toil. To men of this type the tone of Ferguson's opening speech was certainly congenial; and we know that there was a younger generation, not yet attained to places of power, who received it with a secret or open exultation. Nevertheless, to the majority in Glasgow Presbytery, and to a great number throughout the Church, it seemed an audacious and irreverent attack on a document of immemorial authority, and on cherished articles of faith, and even on the central truths of Christianity.

But it was not only or chiefly the tone of Ferguson's attack and the force of his negative criticism which excited hostility and concern. These might have been excused as excesses to be looked for in a speech for the prosecution, designed to enforce action. The element in his deliverance which aroused the deepest opposition, and finally led to his formal trial for heresy, was the positive scheme of doctrine which he expounded as the basis of his protest. This scheme was unfolded in a characteristic way, in language often mystical and unfamiliar, in a style for the most part deliberate, but breaking sometimes into passion and rising more than once to a strain of lofty eloquence. The effect of it was to charm a few among the members of the Court, to delight many in the audience, but to create a general feeling of bewilderment and a sense of something new, perilous, and strange.

Indeed, the strength of the antagonism thus provoked was immediately apparent; for the speeches delivered during the subsequent discussion were for the most part very hostile, though they expressed various degrees of condemnation and diverse tones of sorrow. Moreover, an elder rose at the end of the debate and demanded that the minister of Queen's Park Congregation be immediately prosecuted. Nay, he went further than this, for he forthwith tabled a libel, or formal indictment, charging the Rev. Fergus Ferguson with holding various heterodox opinions. This written accusation had been prepared with a speed unexampled in the annals of Presbyterianism. No doubt its author, being a lawyer, had a professional aptitude for such work, but the rapidity of his performance in this instance was far from illustrating the law's delays. Perhaps he was stimulated to unusual efforts by the excited temper of the Court; perhaps he was moved by a not unwarranted fear that the clergy, if left to their own devices, would leave the heretic alone. In any case, the Presbytery evinced no appreciation of the service rendered by this legal brother. Neither his zeal nor the unparalleled swiftness of his mental exercise was pleasing to the reverend Council, being foreign to the calm and leisurely habits of ecclesiastical procedure. It is one thing to disapprove a man's doctrine and denounce it in the course of legitimate controversy; it is quite another thing to treat him as a theological criminal, and to undertake the laborious

and weary task of putting him on trial. The Presbytery, therefore, decided to take no immediate action, ordered the libel to remain "on the table" till some future date, and straitly charged its author not to print or circulate it until he had received the permission of the Court. Meanwhile, the fathers and brethren went their way, to attend the Synod, to perform their duties, and to consider the matter of this heresy charge, each for himself, during the quiet and relaxation of the summer season.

At this point, therefore, which really marks the beginning of many labours and sorrows, it may be well to pause in our narrative and devote a short chapter to an account of Ferguson's theology, as set forth in his Revision speech and in subsequent addresses and papers. When we have ascertained what that theology really was, and wherein it differed from the traditional Creed, we shall be in a position to consider, without encumbrance and with due understanding, the story of the "Ferguson Heresy Case": that notable Controversy which threatened at one time to disrupt the Church, which certainly cleared the doctrinal atmosphere and wrought a subtle change in many minds; which was also, alike in its inception, its course, and its issue, a remarkable and characteristic exhibition of Presbyterian mentality, of the difficulties of democratic church-government, and of the methods pursued by Scottish ecclesiastical tribunals.

CHAPTER IV.

FERGUSON'S THEOLOGY.

It is said that the religious discussions and conflicts of the later nineteenth century are not of interest to the people of our day. But, if this be so, we cannot plead as a reason for it that we have travelled a long way beyond the positions that were in debate a generation ago. The Churches have not really solved the problems that perplexed the men of the '70's and '80's. We have not marched onward in victorious unity from the scene of their battles, nor attained either a peaceful heritage of triumphant faith or the cold calm of negation. We are carrying still an immense burden of difficulties, and we live in the somewhat chilly region of open questions. The precise relation of the Scottish Kirks to the Confession has not yet been settled; and we still repeat mysterious formulæ and soothe ourselves with Declaratory Acts. Our doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement remain without recognised definition. We have no accepted theory of Inspiration, no rationale of Authority in religion, no articulated conceptions as to the state after death or the ultimate destinies

of mankind. It is evident, then, that we cannot easily justify a supercilious attitude towards the labours of past generations; towards troubles that we have not outgrown and questions that we have not solved.

The real root of such want of interest in theology as actually exists is, no doubt, a vague but widespread notion that we can get along very well without an ordered system of religious truth, that the ethical teaching of Christianity, as to social and individual duty, suffices for our need, though of course this practical teaching requires for its support the inspiring power of worship and of general beliefs as to the goodness of God, the beauty of Christ, and the hope of a life to come. That this attitude of mind does exist in all the Churches we cannot doubt; and wherever it asserts itself theology, which requires for its study a great deal of labour, becomes a thing that may well be left alone.

But, whatever may be said for this way of regarding things, it surely cannot claim to be permanent, or satisfactory, or indeed intellectually respectable. A religion does seem to require and imply a theology. For theology is, after all, simply the reaction of the mind upon the content of faith. It embodies the endeavour of the reason to define and justify belief, to show the logical relation of one truth to another, to detect and expose spurious and outworn conceptions, to maintain in sanity and strength the body of spiritual thought and devotion. To deny, therefore, the need of a theology is to exclude religion from the realm of intel-

ligible existence; and such exclusion must ultimately be fatal in its results. The rational is the real, since reality is the expression of the Divine thought; and to say that faith is not reasonable in its essential nature, and capable of reasonable statement and defence, is to take away its place in the ordered system of things, is to banish it to the region of mere feeling and imagination and unsubstantial dreams. But in that region is no security, nor any power that is able to dominate persistently the wills and hearts of men. It is true, of course, that religion has in it elements that theological science cannot express: wistful longings, fine and delicate instincts, wide visions, soaring hopes and intuitions. It has in it precious things that can be embodied only in artistic forms: in poetic symbols, in liturgy, architecture, music, imagery, and colour. Nevertheless, the strength of it, the foundation and the authority of it, its secret of continuous rule and abiding peace, is the rational truth which dwells in all its varied forms and gives them life and wholesomeness, even as the soul inhabits the body and keeps it from corruption, even as God inhabits the Universe and is of it the glory and the power. And it is of this informing reason and mind of religion that theology is the interpreter and the prophet.

Such, in any case, was Fergus Ferguson's view. The idea of an undogmatic religion was as meaningless to him as it was to Newman; he held that faith must always seek to find a full and adequate intellectual

expression. History, of course, showed that such expression had always been faulty and in need of constant renewal and correction. Nevertheless, a final and complete statement of spiritual truth was ideally possible, and represented the end towards which theology must ever strive. All the historical facts and concrete symbols of Christianity had their rational equivalents in the world of ultimate reality; and these equivalents were able to be discovered by the patient labour of devout and disciplined minds. This view of the matter he expressed with characteristic vigour in one of his speeches: "Spiritual truth, when properly formulated, lies nearer to the first principles of human being, and has in itself greater clearness, certainty, and concatenation, than any of the theorems or problems of mathematics; and a profounder blunder never afflicted and ruined the world than the supposition that it is otherwise."

I.

Philosophy.

Dr. Ferguson, thus, was one of those who believe in Revelation, but believe also in metaphysic. He was profoundly loyal to the great Christian beliefs, which he had received by tradition from the fathers and had found to be verified in his own experience. No one more winningly and simply than he could plead the cause of the Gospel, or minister to troubled and sinful

men its healing and its peace. But he held, at the same time, with entire conviction a type of transcendental philosophy; and he strove without ceasing to interpret the evangel in the light of this philosophy; for it was thus that he hoped to vindicate the Faith.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to give any complete account of Ferguson's philosophy. He was engaged, as we have seen, from the beginning of his ministry till the end of his life, in preparing a great constructive work which was designed to set forth his entire system of thought. But this book was constantly revised and recast; so anxious was he to attain preciseness of expression, so eager to fulfil to the utmost his appointed task. We learn, indeed, from the Rev. James Ferguson that there came a day during his father's closing years when the *magnum opus* seemed to have reached its final form: "Dr. Ferguson was in great jubilation that day. As soon as the book was published, Mary (his youngest daughter and amanuensis) and he were to have a great holiday together. But next day toward evening he said, 'I have been reading what we have done, and I think, my dear—I think that we must go over it all again and simplify it.'" And so the manuscript was taken to pieces and all the labour begun once more. At the last, the structure to which he had devoted the best energies of his mind and heart was left in a state of nearly total ruin, only pathetic fragments remaining to show what might have been. The contemplation of these fragments is

a sad experience for any one who knew their author; for the unfinished work of one revered and loved is always the object of a deep emotion. They inspire, also, a great regret, inasmuch as they give evidence that the treatise of which they are the vestiges would, in its finished form, have secured the respect of all that are fitted to estimate such things. The present writer is, however, convinced that neither these broken pages nor any of Ferguson's other surviving writings afford the materials for a confident exposition of his philosophy. None of the statements of his purely metaphysical positions which remain bears the stamp of finality; all of them, when they are read in chronological order, reveal a varying use of terms, and witness to a process of thought that is moving on from change to change. In these circumstances, an orderly setting forth of his speculative system, in its entirety, is clearly a thing which ought not to be attempted. The dangers of misstatement and misunderstanding are such as cannot be incurred.

There are certain affirmations which may, however, be ventured as to Ferguson's metaphysic; which, indeed, *must* be made if we are to understand his theology. In the formative period of his mental history he was, as already said, powerfully influenced by Hegel. And, while it is true that in later years he came to reject with decision certain elements in the system of the great Idealist, it is also true that his dialectical method continued always to be Hegelian. He seems,

also, to have been a close student of Jacob Boehme, and he certainly wrote a warm appreciation of this teacher, which appeared as the preface to an English edition of his *Letters*. But it is probable that the writings of the marvellous German cobbler were attractive to the Scottish theologian mainly for their purely religious, as distinct from their philosophical, qualities. Certainly, the peculiar features of Boehme's doctrine do not, with one exception, appear in Ferguson's teaching. We find in that teaching nothing about the "Byss" and the "Abyss," or the procession from the Deity of an ordered hierarchy of spiritual Powers, or the Eternal Fire, or the notion that Good and Evil alike have their origin in God.

This last-mentioned speculation, like all forms of Dualism, was, indeed, foreign to Ferguson's method. In common with the vast majority of thinkers, he held that evil, regarded as an object of thought, was simply the negation of all reality, "had no existence in time or space save as a relative form of good."

"When we define the universe as that manifestation of the Divine goodness in which we have the demonstration of the Divine existence, we exclude from the idea of the universe everything that is not a manifestation of the Divine goodness. Evil is not such a manifestation; and, therefore, in so far as the universe is concerned, evil is essentially non-existent. It is that in which we have the existence and evolution of a perverted will: its *existence*, as that which has determined itself in a wrong direction, or in the direction of self-manifestation for the mere glory of self, as distinguished

from the good of others, and thereby directly opposed to the Purpose of God; and its *evolution*, as that which has only to be allowed to come into existence and work itself out, in order to show its essentially negative and self-destructive character. Being at once cause and effect in itself, it may be said to be self-caused. And yet, as a *cause* or perverted will, it brings nothing into existence. It merely turns in upon itself. In like manner, as an *effect* or evolution of a perverted will, it effects nothing. It merely reveals its own fatuity and futility, or its own essential nothingness. It cannot, therefore, be thought, as the universe is thought, when the latter is resolved, as an effect, into that which is higher than itself. We cannot even define evil, as we define anything else, when we distinguish it in thought from everything else; because evil is not thought, being a perverted will working itself out of existence, and proving itself to be the mere negation of good. Thought, as essentially moral, or as that into which will enters, or that which ought to be, is directly opposed to evil, as that which ought not to be." [1]

But, whatever he may have owed to great exponents of philosophy and mysticism, Ferguson's speculative construction was markedly his own. He, indeed, anticipated, in some directions, a good deal of later theorising. It is notable, for instance, that he attached immense importance to psychology, or the doctrine of Human Nature, as partly the foundation and partly the complement of the Doctrine of God: thus, his Thesis for the Doctorate was an endeavour to prove that "a comprehension of human nature, as a subject of thought, implies at every point a corresponding

[1] *Psychology and Theology*, pp. 17–18.

apprehension of the Divine Nature." Also, his Idealism was so modified as to be, in more than one of its aspects, a precursor of "the New Realism." For example, he insisted that space and time were not *merely* modes of thought, but had objective reality as expressive of the Divine mind and will.

Notable, also, in the same way, is Ferguson's doctrine of *Ideas*. He distinguishes *notions* from ideas on the ground that the former of these do not of necessity imply the existence of that which they represent, while the latter do. An idea is a composite structure which is notional as to its outline, but owes its content to rational experience. The test of its soundness is that it constitutes an harmonious whole: and, when it endures such test, it corresponds to real existence.

"It is of importance to notice the illative, or demonstrative, force of an idea, as distinguished from that of a mere notion. They are alike as mere thoughts, or mental formations, of necessity implying the existence of the mind within which they exist; but they differ as a concrete conception, or complete thought, consisting of so many abstract individual thoughts, differs from a single abstract thought. That is to say, an idea cannot exist except as the mental equivalent of that of which it is the idea; but as everything of which we have an idea has at least two aspects,—an aspect as existing in time, and another aspect as existing in space,—it follows that every idea implies the existence of an outer or objective world. Time and space themselves, as the two conditions of universal thought, or of thought as dealing with the universe of God, imply the existence of the universe. On the other hand, a notion

is a pure birth of the mind, to which nothing of necessity corresponds in the outer world, and which of necessity implies nothing, save the existence of the mind of which it is a birth. We may, indeed, have an idea of that which is wholly subjective, say, the idea of self as a subject of thought; but even in that case the idea implies, of necessity, the existence of something more than the mind that thinks. The idea of self as a subject of thought comprehends the whole being of the thinking subject, as consisting of body, soul, and spirit; and that again the existence of time and space. Any two notions, as definitely related to each other in one and the same idea, imply a third notion in which we have the synthesis of the two. If the idea of anything did not of necessity imply the existence of that of which it is the idea, then the idea of God, as that which has been thought, or as an idea existing in the human mind, would not of necessity imply the existence of the Being of whom it is the idea. The effect would not imply the cause. Logic, as the Science of Inference, and the Art of Demonstration would be impossible. But, if all this fail,

> 'The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.'

"An idea, or concrete conception, is not a mere fancy, or conglomerate of lawless fancies, held together in a purely arbitrary way, without any definite relation of the one to the other. It is a whole of thought, having a definite structure, the form and coherence of which is determined by the laws of thought. An idol does not imply the existence of any being to which it corresponds, except the individual who conceived and fashioned it. It is a mere conglomerate of depraved and incongruous notions, without structure from the point of thought. But, in an idea, the notions of which it consists organically cohere, and it is in their structural relation to each other that we seem to have that which implies the

real existence of the object. Consequently, Idealism, as meaning that the only real existences are ideas themselves, is based upon the actual misconception of what an idea, as distinguished from a mere notion, really is; and that again upon the failure to perceive that it takes both the actual and the ideal to constitute the eternal real." [1]

These quotations, then, suffice to show that Dr. Ferguson, as a speculative thinker, was of a very individual type and not easily to be described in the language of the schools. Hegelian in his dialectic, mystical in his habit of mind, a Realist in some of his contentions, he cannot be called the disciple of any one Master or the adherent of any one tradition. If, however, we desired to mark him by a general designation, we should be disposed to call him a rational mystic. A Rationalist in the true derivative sense of the term, though not in its popular acceptation, he certainly was, inasmuch as he believed that faith was a form of reason, and that nothing could be true which was not rational. During his arraignment of the Confession he was interrupted by some one who declared that a doctrine he was then attacking "was in the Word of God"; and his reply was, "How can a patent illogicality be in the Word of God?" This was a characteristic saying; for in Ferguson's view a thing that was illogical was a thing that was false. We may conjecture, indeed, that there was always a conflict in his mind between his acute, critical, even destructive understanding and the

[1] *Psychology and Theology*, pp. 8–9.

requirements of his profoundly religious nature. It is significant of this that he describes the understanding, operating alone, as working "death," that is to say, chaos; which was practically Newman's view. On the other hand, there was much in his mentality that was poetic, imaginative, emotional; much that can be described only by the term mysticism. This latter quality of his intelligence gave depth and "atmosphere" to his teaching, was the source of the elevation which characterised his discourse, and was displayed often in singular and startling gleams of spiritual insight and in oratorical passages of peculiar power and solemnity. But it sometimes gave to his reasoning a semblance of confusion, led him not seldom to seek the heights of truth by a flight on the wing rather than by a patient climbing of the hill, rendered him comparatively indifferent to history, and betrayed him into positions that seemed to the ordinary mind untenable and hardly to be reconciled with his unquestionable genius. He held, for instance, a formally rigid doctrine of inspiration that involved him in strange ingenuities of interpretation, though it never interfered in the least with his freedom of thought.

But the truth is that these eccentricities of opinion meant one thing for Ferguson and quite another thing for men of a different type. His theory of plenary inspiration, for example, was a purely abstract doctrine arising out of his belief in the organic unity of thought and language. He held that truth depended for its

identity on its expression. To speak of an idea being inspired, while the mode in which it uttered itself was left without a share in the alleged inspiration, seemed to him a mere absurdity. It was, in his view, like saying that God created the soul of a man but that his body created itself. The spirit of Revelation, without its appointed form, was only a sort of ghost; spirit and form together constituted the word of God. This is all that the notion of plenary inspiration signified for Ferguson's mind. And the reactionaries who thought they had found in him a kindred soul, as well as the "liberals" who supposed him to be a mere obscurantist, were wholly mistaken, not understanding the man. His view of the Bible was substantially that of Origen, and Origen was no inconsiderable theologian. In estimating Ferguson's whole position as to this matter we must remember also his statement, during his Trial, that the test of canonicity, in the case of any book of Scripture, was its power to show that it had an appointed place in the process of Revelation; also, in one of his speeches, he referred to "the light of God's Word, and the light of those *equally divine gifts* of reason and conscience which God has given to men." Surely these are not statements which suggest a narrow and literal doctrine of Biblical authority.

In any case, there can be no doubt that the combination of the mystic and the logician which we find in Ferguson's mentality was the secret of his interest and charm, giving freshness and unexpectedness to

his discourse and conversation, imparting to all he said and wrote a refeshing individuality, securing for him a perpetual freedom from the dreary domination of the commonplace. At the same time it involved in peculiar difficulty his cherished task of complete dogmatic statement. The foundations of his system were well and securely laid in a series of postulates and definitions; and, as we have seen, it was his hope to erect on these a systematic, coherent structure of thought. But the execution of this plan demanded a severe adherence to a dialectical method, such as was almost impossible for an intellect that was haunted by those intuitional gleams and direct inspirations which continually evade the grasp of logic and the limits of verbal form. We may conjecture that the splendid perplexities thus created were the main cause of that continued dissatisfaction with his work which led Ferguson to its perpetual recasting and reconstruction, and issued finally in the sacrifice of the greater part of all that he had written. Moreover, we shall see as we now proceed to the consideration of his purely theological teaching that here also omissions and apparent contradictions are found that are due to the complexity of his mental constitution. At the same time, however, we shall find that he attained, in this part of his labour, a most impressive achievement of coherent thought.

II.

Theology.

Doctrine of God.

Dr. Ferguson's theology began, as indeed all theologies must, with the doctrine of God. He held a form of the ontological argument for the Divine existence; the nature of thought involved the being of God. This position, of course, followed of necessity from his conception of ideas. An idea was a complex of notions which owed its content to rational experience, and the proof of its validity was that the various elements in it formed an harmonious whole; as thus valid, it guaranteed the real existence of that for which it stood. And, inasmuch as the idea of God was, when tested in this way, found to be authentic, it proved the objective existence of Deity.

Now, this is a piece of reasoning which will be variously estimated by various types of mind; but to the present writer it seems essentially sound. It is, of course, true that the ontological form of proof is at present somewhat in disfavour; but that is not a matter which need engage our attention. Most of the criticism to which the argument in question has been subjected seems either to destroy all relation between thought and reality, or else to be beside the mark. Kant's objection, for instance, that the idea of so many coins as existing in a man's pocket is no proof that they

do so exist, and that in the same way the idea of the Divine Being does not involve the conclusion that He really is—this objection, at least as commonly stated, surely contains a fallacy. The fallacy lies in the phrase "in the pocket," which introduces the notion of place and thus subtly diverts attention from the point really at issue. It is true that the idea of sovereigns *in a man's pocket or purse* does not imply that they are actually there; but it is equally true that it does imply the existence of such a thing as a sovereign. We may entertain a false belief that sovereigns are here or there; but if there was no such reality as a sovereign, the image of it, self-consistent and definite, would not be in our minds.

Dr. Ferguson defines God as the "absolutely Good One"; and by this he means that He is the absolutely self-harmonious One, in whom is the identity of thought and being; and, further, that "He exists for the purpose of manifesting Himself to others." In His fulfilment of this purpose, He is known to us under "three forms of absolute self-manifestation, called in Scripture the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"; "the omnipotent Love from which all things proceed, the omniscient Light in which all things stand revealed, the omnipresent Spirit by which all things are upheld." "The Divine Being is, thus, three Persons in one God and one God in three Persons."

When this doctrine of the Divine Trinity was first expounded to the Presbytery it was challenged; the

ground of objection being, in the first place, that it was accompanied by a severe criticism of the Confessional teaching on the subject. Ferguson argued that the unity of the Godhead, as stated by the Westminster Divines, was "not one of personal being at all, but a unity founded on the three abstract terms, substance, power, and eternity," which was "no more than could be predicated, from a pantheistic point of view, of the whole of impersonal nature." He, further, insisted that "the distinction between the persons of the Trinity, resting on the words 'eternally begotten' and 'eternally proceeding' was not only unscriptural but absurd." And, finally, he denied the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, asserting that "the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, but always in and through the Son"; thus adopting the position of the Eastern Church. In retaliation for this not inappropriate criticism, he was accused of presenting in his own statement a doctrine which really meant no more than that God revealed Himself to us under three distinct forms of manifestation. This charge he met with the answer that self-manifestation was his definition of personal existence. And this seems to have satisfied the Presbytery, for it withdrew the assertion that he was guilty of heresy as to the doctrine of the Trinity.

One may confess some surprise, however, that the Presbytery was so easily persuaded at this point. For it is by no means clear that Ferguson's construction was Trinitarian *in the traditional sense.* It is true that

"self-manifestation" really did define "personal existence," in this theologian's language, for he meant by the former of these terms, not only self-revelation to others, but the consciousness of self, as distinguished from the idea of self and as distinct from other beings. When, therefore, he said that God existed in three forms of absolute self-manifestation, he certainly had in mind three forms of personal existence. But, then, we must take into consideration the meaning of "existence" in his phraseology. Thus, he says, "Being in general is the co-existence of substance and essence in one. Being, abstractly considered, is invisible and unthinkable. Substance is being as indivisible. Essence is being, as divisible in thought into quantity and quality. Existence is Being, considered as visible. It is the essence, as having come out, in and through the substance, into manifestation." Hence it followed that God, as pure Being, was unknowable to us: it was only as entering into the realm of qualities and relations, of space and time, that He attained self-manifestation, was personal, was comprehensible by us. Thus only was He *existent*; and, as so existent, He was conscious of Himself, and revealed Himself to us, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That this was Ferguson's doctrine appears in his saying that the term "begotten," as applied to the Son, like the term "proceeding" as applied to the Spirit, "belonged, not to the eternal being of God, but to that being as manifested in time and space."

Now this reasoning appears to be much more difficult than it really is. When Ferguson begins, for instance, with God as pure Being, he is only doing as he must. For all thorough thinking must find its starting-point in the idea of that concerning which we can say only that it *is*. We cannot do other than affirm this idea, but beyond it we cannot go. And this thought of pure Being must be identified with the thought of God, since it is alone and companionless: there cannot be two ultimate ideas. When this theologian further says that Being becomes existence when it enters the region of relations and qualities, he certainly speaks intelligibly, since it is only as having qualities and relations that Being is knowable, and existence is that which is knowable. From this it follows that God is knowable, and therefore existent, only as He is self-manifest in the region of the related and the qualified. It is as thus existing that He presents Himself to our minds in such a way that we can speak of Him as personal and self-conscious, as Love and Justice and Power. And when Ferguson takes the further step of asserting that God is conscious of Himself as triune, knows Himself and manifests Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he is simply affirming that the Divine nature corresponds to the threefoldness of all thought.

It appears, then, that this doctrine of God is intelligible and coherent; it is also Trinitarian, but it is not so in the usual sense of the expression. It is highly

speculative and daring, but it can hardly be described as orthodox. And the Presbytery, in allowing it to pass uncondemned, showed a liberal spirit and a desire to allow a large measure of freedom to men of philosophical bent. Perhaps, also, they felt that a debate on the doctrine of the Trinity would lead them into a region which they did not desire to tread.

The Universe.

From the thought of God the mind naturally passes to the thought of that visible system of things in which He is made known. This, at least, was the order in which our theologian set forth his teaching before the Presbytery. The Universe, "the whole of things considered as one," was rightly called the Creation of God; nevertheless, it was a mistake to say, as the Confession did, that the Universe was made "out of nothing," for it had its origin in the eternal Word of its Maker, and was, therefore, ideally without a beginning. "Just as the word of a man is the free expression of his thought, so the Universe is the free expression of an idea which lay in God from all eternity. And we know what that idea is, for we have already seen its expression. Therefore the Universe was not made out of nothing, for nothing is that of which we have no idea. In so far as we can see, the act of creation is no more essentially mysterious than the birth and utterance of thought. To utter a word which has no meaning would be very

like bringing something out of nothing. But the Universe is not such a word."

What, then, is the "meaning" of the Universe, the reason for its existence, the end and purpose of its being? The answer to this question is that the Universe owes its birth and continuance to the necessity of self-manifestation which is the law of the Divine life. It is the organ whereby God fulfils Himself in the impartation of Himself to His creatures. Its meaning, therefore, is ultimately love, for love is essentially the finding of one's own good in the blessedness of others. But Creation, in thus revealing love as its own "final law," reveals love to be also the final law for all creatures. Rightly interpreted, it makes known the path of life for man to be obedience to the requirements: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself"; "He that would save his life must lose it." Self-fulfilment by self-surrender is thus made known, by "the light of Nature," to be the secret of the Divine existence, and to be the Divinely ordained principle in conformity to which lies the well-being of every man. This light of Nature was designed to be the guide of unfallen man, and it still suffices to secure acceptance with God for all those who follow it according to the measure of their knowledge. "Man is made to think correctly, to act accordingly, and so to secure his blessedness." Moreover, the chief end of Revelation itself is to enable us to see the meaning of the original law of life, in the fulness of its glory, and at the same

time to be the means of aiding our obedience thereto. "Whoever is in any degree faithful to the light he has, whether it be the light of Nature or of Revelation, is to that extent accepted in the sight of God. God, as the Father of lights, is the source of both Nature and Revelation. The advantage of Revelation is that it takes away from the heart of man the veil that obscures that manifestation of Himself which God has given in the general universe, and that it is the channel of a larger measure of Divine influence."

This position was representative of the general habit of Ferguson's mind, and especially of his desire to avoid all dualisms and make an end of all unreconciled oppositions. It was enforced also, in all its implications, with the utmost rigour. Thus, he disowned any absolute distinction between law and grace. Law, being the expression of the Divine mind, was the expression of love. "The very notion of law itself runs into grace; for if law is the will of God expressed in a definite form in relation to us, it is altogether a gracious thing on the part of God to express His will." Similarly, all grace, even the Gospel itself, was at many points identical with law: directed by the same spirit, through the same methods, to the same ends. "Certainly, a distinction is made in the Scriptures between law and gospel; but it is made for the purpose of showing that the one, as distinguished from the other, has no essential perpetuity at all. The law is everlasting, just to the extent that it is taken up into the spirit of the gospel and

absorbed therein." There were four forms of law: the natural law revealed in the visible Creation, the moral law written in human nature, the spiritual law made manifest in Christ, the combination of all these as set forth in the Scriptures as a whole; and these were all identical with the Gospel. "The Gospel is the enlightenment of the mental being, and, as such, it moves along the lines and works in accordance with the laws of thought." Thus, "all law is grace and all grace is law, streaming through the whole of time." There was no such thing as a Covenant of works, as distinct from a Covenant of grace. Man stood from first to last in the position towards God of being the object of His grace, and the only Covenant between the Divine Father and His creatures was that which was written from the beginning on the constitution of man's being: the eternal Covenant which might be thus expressed, "Be true to thyself and thou shalt be true to God."

The Divine Decrees.

When we think of God and then of the Universe, there necessarily enters into our minds the thought of that Divine purpose which is at work in the system of things. This, accordingly, was the next step in Ferguson's construction; and it was at this point that the extent of his departure from the orthodoxy of his time decisively appeared. It was not that he abjured the doctrine of the Divine Decrees. So far

was he from rejecting this belief that it was essential to his whole dogmatic scheme. No one ever held more strongly than he that God was Sovereign throughout His entire dominions; no one was ever less ready to entertain the notion that the Supreme Will could suffer a final defeat. Indeed, the idea of a Divine purpose did not present the difficulties to him which it does to some minds. There are many thinkers, especially among the Mystics, who dislike to speak of God as designing, or intending anything. "Purpose" they feel to involve the conception of a before and after; whereas the Infinite One dwells in an eternal Now, not looking forward or behind, nor proposing things for the years that are to come. But to Ferguson, time, like space, was a reality even to God. As personally existing He entered into time and space, dwelling in them, though not limited by them. Hence there was peculiar actuality for him in the thought of a Divine plan and intention. But, then, his conception of that plan and intention was very different from that of Calvin. When he spoke of "predestination" he meant simply that God had determined the end and issue of things. "Foreordination" signified, for him, that the order of the revealing process of God was fixed from eternity. The doctrine of "Election" had for its import that the purpose of Deity to redeem and bless all men was to be attained through the conformity of men to appointed law, and that the chosen of God were those who by their free acceptance of that law made

themselves the instruments of the predestined universal consummation. The eternal purpose of God was thus, according to this theology, universal in the end it had in view, a kingdom of blessedness for all creatures; it was certain of attainment; it was morally conditioned, implying the freedom of all spirits; as to the order of its unfolding, it was ordained from of old; and the ministers of its attainment were souls who were chosen of God, and had attested themselves, as the glad participants in His counsel of law and grace.

Doctrine of Human Nature.

The idea of Man is, from the philosophical point of view, the connecting link between the idea of God and the idea of the Universe. The human creature belongs in part to the dependent, derivative system of things; but in virtue of his spiritual being he rises above the level of the Universe in general and shares in the freedom of the Divine life. Man, also, gives meaning to the whole of Creation, interprets its purpose, and is, indeed, the main object as well as agent of that purpose. Hence Ferguson's theology passes on from the doctrines of God, of the Universe and of the Divine Decrees, to the doctrine of Human Nature.

In this further movement of thought he continues to reveal a wide divergence from orthodoxy. It may even be said that it was his teaching as to the constitution of human nature, and its position and powers

in its fallen estate, that was the root of those alleged heresies for which he was ultimately condemned.

Man, according to our theologian, was a trinity in unity, and was thus made in the threefold image of the Divine. This conception was, of course, derived from Boehme and was wrought out with the utmost care, according to the methods of Mysticism.[1] Into the elaborations of this doctrine of correspondence, however, it is not proposed to enter in these pages, for Dr. Ferguson's statements as to the matter vary a good deal and are not, in truth, clearly understood by the present writer. There are perhaps few people, after all, that are able to comprehend Boehme, either in his own writings or in those of his interpreters. Let it suffice to say that the Scottish mystic followed the German in his contention that Man, as body, soul, and spirit, was constituted in the likeness of God, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It may be noted, however, that this contention throws light on Ferguson's doctrine of the Trinity. In the exposition of the latter given on a preceding page no reference was made to a question of considerable importance: Were we to understand that each element in the Godhead, considered separately, was a Person or only a principle of personal being? This question was omitted for the reason that our author's statements on the point seem to be at

[1] Cf. St. Augustine: *Homo habet tres partes, spiritum, animam et corpus, itaque est imago Sacrosanctæ Trinitatis.* But Dr. Ferguson elaborated this doctrine after the manner of Boehme.

variance with each other. But his teaching as to a strict correspondence between the nature of God and that of man, does appear to imply that God can be called a Person, that is to say, a complete self-manifestation, only in the fulness of His threefold life. Just as body, soul, and spirit together constitute the human being, so Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in their unity, constitute the self-conscious, personal God.

But, however this may be, Ferguson's account of our common nature is perfectly clear. The body is in itself purely passive, the instrument and organ of the soul. The soul is intelligence, mind. The spirit is, specifically, will, spontaneity, free and self-directed life; it informs both soul and body, and, together with them, constitutes the synthesis which is the human personality. The spirit is not a creature as soul and body are; it is an emanation of the Divine; it is the link between God and Man; it is the channel through which the Deity continually imparts His own all-supporting life; it "is indeed God." If, therefore, the spirit were withdrawn from the constitution of a man his proper existence would be dissolved; he would remain no longer a personal being; whatever was left would be in no respect superior to the lower levels of life.

Now, it is evident that this doctrine involved far-reaching inferences as to the moral powers and possibilities of fallen humanity. Inasmuch as freedom of will was the essential characteristic of spirit, it was

evident that man could not lose that freedom so long as he possessed any spiritual part; so long, in brief, as he continued to be man. To say, therefore, that he was "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil," was to say that he, as possessing no longer freedom of choice, had forfeited that higher element in him which constituted his complete personality, had become merely a creature of soul and body and had lost all vital relation to God. It was, in literal effect, to affirm that he had ceased to be human. Hence, when Ferguson was asked whether he believed that "the natural man," as thus described, was able to save himself, he replied:

"This question turns on one of the finest distinctions that can be made, the distinction between nature and will, or between that which is altogether under necessity and that which is essentially free. Will I regard as essentially supernatural; and by a 'natural man' I understand a being totally destitute of the grace of God. Such a being is essentially no higher than a brute. I am asked, then, if I believe that such a creature is able to convert himself—able, that is, to translate himself out of the mere natural in which he is supposed to be sunk, into the supernatural. Certainly I do not believe that, any more than I believe a beast of the earth can create itself, and having done so thereafter evolve itself into an archangel. But neither do I believe that any human being in this world is so entirely devoid of the grace of God as the question supposes. On the contrary, I believe that man, in the lowest condition to which he can sink in this world, has still a Divine element within him in virtue of which he has not 'wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good

accompanying salvation.' If he were in such a lost condition as the question supposes, human responsibility would be at an end, and human salvation an impossibility. That I emphatically deny. The Confession teaches that man, as he comes into the world, 'is dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.' The bodily senses and the mental powers of understanding, reason, imagination, and memory are such faculties. Are all these, in the case, say, of a child of Christian parents, who has not as yet been consciously converted, wholly defiled? To my mind the whole thing seems to be monstrous. That which is so out of harmony with common sense and common experience cannot be true. So to disgrace man is surely not the way to exalt the grace of God, for undoubtedly it ultimately comes to casting the blame of such a condition on the prime Agent in the whole matter. My answer, therefore, to this question is, that I do not believe that man, as fallen into sin, is so totally sundered from the supernatural as to be unable even to respond to God, not to say co-operate with God, in the matter of his own salvation. If he can so respond, however feebly, then he can will something that is spiritually good and accompanying salvation. And if he cannot so respond he is literally irresponsible."

In another passage he said:

"I believe that man, on the ground of nature, is a fallen creature. He has lapsed from his original position, but he has not fallen into perdition itself; which he would have done if he were in the condition described in the Confession. He has fallen beyond the power of self-recovery, without the help of God; but not beyond the power of self-recovery, with the help of God. The way of salvation is just the Divine method of helping man to attain his true and ultimate position."

It is evident, then, that Ferguson, in consonance with his whole view of things, regarded sin as creating for man a moral disability but not an entire inability. He would have said, with Dorner, that "the soul remained metaphysically good." The human creature retained his natural relation to God, inasmuch as the spirit had not been withdrawn from him. He was still "able to think correctly and act accordingly, and so to secure his blessedness." It must be remembered, however, that the whole question as to whether or no a man could "save himself" was transcended, in this theologian's dialectic. In his view, we could accomplish no act of any kind "in our own strength"; we "could not even sin in our own strength; for sin was simply the perversion of God's own gifts." That spiritual quality within us to which we owed our very personality was continually dependent for existence on God, of whose life it formed a part. Hence every good action of ours, whether we were regenerate or not, was done by the power of God. The new birth itself was a renewal of our nature but not an alteration of it into something different. There was no such thing as "natural goodness," for all goodness was supernatural, as indeed was the will of man itself. It was, therefore, meaningless to say of any particular moral achievement, even salvation, that it was ours alone, or God's alone. All acts of faith, hope, or love were of one order, and were the fruit of Divine Grace working through the agency of the free human spirit.

In all this, however, there was no minimising of the guilt of sin, even as there was no belittling of the saving power of God. Evil, as an object of thought, was, indeed, as we have seen, purely negative, a perversion of the will, and had no positive existence. In conceiving the Universe as the manifestation of God we "thought out of it all that was hostile to that manifestation" as having no reality. And in that sense sin had no reality. But this doctrine did not in the least interfere with the conviction that sin was a stern and tragic fact in our experience. Darkness is just the negation of light, and weakness is just the negation of strength, and death is just the negation of life; nevertheless, darkness and weakness and death are things to be reckoned with, to be felt and known. And, in like manner, evil, though it be the opposite of good, which is the alone real, is a power which is the more dreadful in that it belongs to the realm of nothingness. Our theologian's philosophical conception of sin was, after all, St. Augustine's; and no one has ever suggested that St. Augustine made light of human guilt. And Ferguson's own teaching on the matter was of the utmost austerity. Evil, as the denial of the Divine will and thought, was utterly destructive and deadly. Its logical issue was, indeed, the dissolution of the ordered Universe. The moment that man fell before temptation he pronounced, therefore, his own sentence of destruction; he took a step which meant alienation from the source of all life; he incurred the penalty of losing his spiritual

part and suffering thereby the annihilation of his personality. And the fact that this doom was not actually experienced was due to the continued interposition of God, who withdrew not His Holy Spirit from man, but hourly preserved his soul from death, and from day to day renewed his will. Nay, the Divine mercy went further than this, rendering even sin the instrument of a beneficent purpose; "not, indeed, bringing good out of evil (that being an impossibility), but bringing a further good out of Himself, of which further good evil had become the occasion."

The Person and Work of Christ.

But the "further good" thus indicated is exhibited and attained through the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ. At this point, therefore, in our exposition we come to the discussion of Dr. Ferguson's doctrine as to the Person and Work of the Saviour: a doctrine which, with its eschatological implications, forms the climax of his construction. It was also the chief cause of his condemnation by his Church.

In the first chapter of this volume reference was made to the historical relation of Fergus Ferguson's teaching to that of MacLeod Campbell; and the reality of this relation will appear at every step of our statement. But, at the same time, it will become apparent that the later thinker preserved his independent standpoint; that in some respects he differed from his predecessor,

while at others he elaborated and carried to their logical conclusions ideas which Campbell did no more than suggest.

1. Thus, both these theologians held the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ, and held it under a form of the Logos conception, as expounded by Philo and accepted by St. John. But we search *The Nature of the Atonement* in vain for any explicit and reasoned statement on this subject, while in Ferguson's discussions we find a constant endeavour to make the matter plain. Thus, as to the Person of Christ, he writes :

"As God manifest in the flesh, Christ is that One who, alone in our nature, comprehends the Father, and is able to reveal the Father to us. That is to say, in the Person of Christ we have that manifestation of the Divine goodness in which we have the demonstration of the existence of God the Son, the second Person in the Godhead.

"As Son of God, He is that One in whom the Father beholds the idea of Himself, as an idea existing in His own mind. That is to say, He is the Logos, or Word which was in the beginning with God and was God.

"As Son of Man, He is that same 'Word made flesh,' or the idea of God, as embodied in our Nature. That is to say, the whole purpose of God, as pertaining to the individual man, is realised in Christ.

"As both in one Person, He is that One by whom alone we can be brought to the saving knowledge of God. That is to say, it is in and through Him alone that we can be perfectly reconciled to God."

In each of these paragraphs it will be noted that

the sentences beginning with "That is to say" give the equivalent in ordinary speech of that which has just been stated in more abstract terms. If this be noted, it will be seen that the doctrine of Incarnation enunciated is not quite certainly orthodox. It may be read as signifying simply that in Christ there is manifested the Divine Goodness in that aspect of it which belongs to the principle of Sonship inherent in the Divine life, the ideal Humanity hidden in God; that in Christ, therefore, the "whole purpose of God" for the individual is realised, namely, the attainment of a perfect manhood, and that in Him, thus, man is reconciled to God. It is to be observed, also, that Christ is identified with the Word which, in turn, is identified with the Son. But it will be remembered that Ferguson elsewhere teaches that the Universe is also the manifestation of the Word. And this would seem to imply that God is manifest in Christ *in the same manner* as in the Universe, with this difference only that in Christ there is found that personal response to the Father which the Creation as a whole cannot supply. This interpretation is, however, somewhat conjectural, and is not advanced with assurance. It is certain that Dr. Ferguson believed in the Incarnation. But the theoretic basis of his belief is not easily set forth.

It seems, however, that we are justified in saying that Ferguson emphasised, as Campbell also did, the affirmation that the Redeemer embodies the eternal

Sonship, or ideal Humanity, which is identical with the second Person of the Trinity. This, for instance, is clearly involved in the following passage which sets forth the achievements of Christ as in essence and representatively the achievements of the whole Race. It is a passage which Campbell himself might have written. "*God in Christ is God enabling Man to recover himself from the pollution, penalty, and perdition of sin. In the Incarnation, God replenishes the whole being of Man with new power so that man in Christ is altogether himself again, and able to cope with his destiny. In the holiness of Christ, Man thoroughly repents of all his sin, and feels the burden of it rolling away, as a dark cloud from off his soul. In the death of Christ, man pays for man the extreme penalty of sin, as separation from God, drinking to the dregs that bitter cup of woe. In the resurrection of Christ, the whole regenerated being of man, in the full possession of all its powers, mounts up into immortal energy and youth. And in the ascension and heavenly reign of Christ, man fulfils his destiny, as a being made, under God, to attain the comprehension and control of the Universe.*" [1]

This statement presents in a kind of historical symbolism the whole process of God's redeeming work, as fulfilled under the conditions of time, yet after an eternal pattern. It is the doing of God, but it is also the doing of man in the person of man's divine Representative and Head, Jesus Christ.

[1] Additiona Statement, pp. 31, 32.

2. When we proceed to consider Dr. Ferguson's teaching as to the nature of the Atonement, or reconciliation of all things, actually and ideally secured by the Saviour, it is necessary to bear in mind three elements in this theologian's doctrine. In the first place, everything, from God Himself to the lowliest of creatures, existed for the purpose of self-manifestation, of showing itself to be that which it really was. In the second place, and following from this, "the justice of God was the necessity resting on God, to be true to Himself in the way of showing what He is; and the consequent necessity imposed upon everything that exists of also showing itself to be what it is in order to its being brought, if possible, into harmony with God." Divine justice was thus "the demand that the law of all existence must ultimately be one with the law of Divine existence, as self-manifestation." In the third place, Ferguson, like all mystics, denied, in effect, the distinction between justification and sanctification. A man was accepted by God as soon as he set his face away from evil and began to be faithful to the light given him. But his complete justification would be attained only when he came to be in perfect harmony with the Divine will. The righteousness of Christ was imputed to him only in so far as he shared it, becoming obedient to the Father even as Christ was obedient. Hence salvation, in its individual completeness, was not of time but of eternity.

Now the last of these three positions differs but

little from the ordinary doctrine. It does not matter greatly whether we say that the first step on the path of the higher life "justifies" us in the Divine eyes, or that it "secures our acceptance" with God. Nor does there seem to be an important distinction between describing the subsequent process of justification as being "sanctified" or as "being conformed to the will of the Father." Ferguson's phraseology has, however, the advantage of avoiding merely forensic and external associations and making clear the truth that the goodness which God accepts is an actuality and not a fiction. As to the statement that the purpose of all existence is self-manifestation, this may seem abstract and unreal, but it is, in truth, plain common sense and matter of fact. For what other reason should the Absolute and Transcendent God have entered into the region of existence, the region of space and time, if not to fulfil and reveal Himself? To what end did He create the Universe if not for the same purpose? And if self-manifestation be, thus, the law of Divine existence, it must be the law also of all existence whatsoever. In like manner, Ferguson's definition of justice is perfectly valid, being approximately the same as that of Plato. What is justice if it be not harmony, the existence of things in proper relation each to each? What, then, can the demand of Divine justice be but that all creatures shall live in harmony with one another, with their own true selves, and with their Creator?

If, then, these peculiarities of Ferguson's thought be remembered, the following statement of his will be quite easily understood :

"We understand how evil is permitted to exist in harmony with the principle of the Divine Existence, when we see that it exists on the express condition of showing itself to be what it really is. In doing so, its ultimate effect is to establish in the mind an immovable conviction as to the reality of goodness. When that is done the justice of God is satisfied. The justice of God is not a sanguinary and vindictive principle, delighting in mere destruction, and demanding an equivalent for something lost. Its ultimate satisfaction is the bringing of everything into harmony with God. The relation of Christ to this result is that it is only in and through Him that the principle of justice, as a principle of the Divine Being, is fully manifested. In His life, as distinguished from His death, the principle of justice is manifested, apart from sin altogether. It is in His death, as distinguished from His life, that we see the justice of God in its relation to human sin. God Himself is there seen in the person of His Son, manifesting to the whole universe the ultimate issue of sin, as the annihilation of the creature, as that issue could not have been seen in the mere creature, if the creature was still to live. God Himself, in our nature, gave Himself as a ground on which this manifestation could be made, for the purpose, in the first instance, of rendering it thereafter unnecessary to have the same truth illustrated again on the meanest scale of the creature's existence ; and in the second place, of laying a foundation on which every one may be brought back to God. It is only in accordance with this view that I can understand such passages of Scripture as these : 'Christ tasted death for every man' ; 'As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all

be made alive.' And it is only in this way, I think, that we are delivered from the terrible dilemma in which we are at present theologically involved, as to the efficacy of Christ's death—the one horn of which is that the death of Christ avails for all, but only conditionally, being contingent for its efficacy on the faith of man, thus contradicting the absoluteness of God in the matter, and making the whole scheme of the universe a peradventure ; and the other horn of which is that it really avails only for a limited portion of the human race, thus contradicting the goodness of God. In His work as a servant and sufferer upon the earth, Christ was not so much giving back to God an equivalent for something man had failed to render, as carrying out a principle of the Divine Being which man had failed to carry out. Nor was the manifestation full or finished in the death of Christ, to the exclusion of His kingly work in heaven now, and His judicial work at the end of the world : the justice of God not being satisfied until righteousness has triumphed over iniquity and love over hatred throughout the whole universe."

If we read this utterance in the light of all Dr. Ferguson's statements on the subject of Atonement, we are enabled to summarise his doctrine in the following short paraphrase : Evil has no place among the realities of the Universe, being the opposite of all reality. But it has a relative existence as a perversion of the will by reason of which man has chosen the path of self-fulfilment for his own supposed happiness, and has correspondingly departed from the true path of self-fulfilment for the good of others and the glory of God. Evil, as thus relatively actual, must obey the law of all existence, inasmuch as it must be permitted

to work itself out to an end, to manifest its true nature as mere futility and nothingness, negation and death. But the logical end of evil is the dissolution of all creatures, since it is the denial of the Divine law by which they live. Hence, it cannot be allowed to fulfil itself in the experience of mankind; for that would mean the extinction of our race. God, therefore, has interposed in the person of Christ, the eternal Son, in whom is the absolute, uncreated Humanity. On Him evil has concentrated all its forces, and in His death has attained the end of its being, manifesting itself as it truly is. The doom thus wrought was one which no creature could have borne and lived; but Christ in virtue of His Divine life had power to endure it, and through its endurance has passed to immortal victory. Sin, therefore, as a thing that is able to destroy the creature, is ideally ended. No soul can perish as all might have perished had not the Redeemer died. There remain, however, the actual transgressions of men which the Saviour did not, and could not, render impossible. These are atoned for in the sight of God through the eternal Priesthood of Christ; for in that eternal Priesthood He propitiates God, who sees in Him the fulfilment of the end for which man was created, the beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. Also, Christ in this supreme and everlasting vocation presents before the Father the fruit of the sacrifice through which He once for all made an end of sin. On the basis of this sacrifice, and as the continuance and perfecting

in eternity of that which was begun in history, He offers Himself, as it were, a perpetual prayer for the people, ever living to make intercession for us. Christ is thus the continual and everlasting Atonement, always complete yet always in process: satisfying the Divine justice by realising the harmony which justice requires; completing the Divine purpose, as being the attainment of the end for which all things exist; and fulfilling the Divine love, as the perfect self-realisation of God in the life of that manhood which He made at first in His own image, and to the end that it might conform itself to His own likeness.

Such was Ferguson's doctrine of Atonement, in so far as it is understood by the present writer. It is curious that only one speaker, during the heresy trial, indicated its remarkable resemblance to the doctrine set forth in Campbell's *Nature of the Atonement*. It is, however, not so much a repetition as a development of the latter teaching. For whereas Campbell emphasised mainly the atoning work of intercession that was achieved by Christ in the days of His flesh, Ferguson dwells almost exclusively on the perpetuation of that work in eternity. For Campbell, the Cross was the Crown of the Saviour's ministry on earth; for Ferguson, it was the foundation of His availing Priesthood in Heaven.

Eschatology.

In his doctrine of the Last Things Ferguson ventured into a region of thought which Campbell had refused to enter. Nevertheless, his teaching as to the Consummation was a logical deduction from Campbell's position, just as certainly as it was the necessary fulfilment of his own doctrine of Atonement. It was, at the same time, the unavoidable climax, not only of his theory of Redemption but of his entire dialectic.

We have seen that, according to this theology, men are accepted in the sight of God from the moment that they yield obedience to His law, but that their salvation in its fulness is reserved for them till the Day of the Restitution of all things. Not even at the hour of death do they enter into their complete inheritance. In the intermediate state they enjoy the rest that remaineth for the people of God; they have foretastes of the final blessedness; they are prepared and made fit for the eternal Kingdom; they await in peace the Consummation. As for the unregenerate, their punishment begins at death and ends, so far as positive suffering is concerned, at the hour of Judgment.

Death means for all men the dissolution of the complete personality into its three elements of body, soul, and spirit. The body is given over to corruption, the spirit returns to God who gave it; the soul alone remains to inhabit the region of being which lies between the end of mortal existence and the beginning of that

fulness of personal life which is immortal and everlasting. But inasmuch as the soul is simply intelligence, this intermediate state must be, for all men whether good or evil, a state of thought, of mental perception, and nothing more. Without the body the soul cannot act, without the spirit it cannot will; but it is maintained by Divine power in the possession of self-consciousness, and it is able to think. It can remember, also, and understand. Though it has become in large measure the passive recipient of mental impressions, a mere mirror in which the images of reality reflect themselves, it is on that account all the more open to the influences of truth, all the more sensitive to the light of Revelation. In this condition it reviews in memory the past life on earth, and it is so illumined that it sees all things as they are. Those who wilfully have rejected Christ in this mortal existence comprehend the meaning and guilt of this great refusal; those who have been without Christian privileges in this earthly state, and have been unfaithful to the light given them, are brought face to face with the Saviour hereafter and discern that they have implicitly denied Him in denying the good they knew. Thus they are led to condemn themselves, and in the mental suffering they endure they find their hell, and also their purification. On the other hand, those who have been followers of Christ in their terrestrial pilgrimage, whether consciously through their reception of the Gospel or unconsciously through their obedience to the inner

law; these all, having died in a state of acceptance with God, are enabled in the clearer light to see light clearly, grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Father, and beholding the beauty of the Lord, are conformed to His image from glory to glory.

Thus the process of discipline and education goes on, in the experience of all souls, until the Day of Resurrection. As to the precise nature of that Resurrection we know nothing except that it is the lot of every man, and that it restores to each the element of individual being which is represented in this present life by the body. Thus it fulfils the law which ordains that

> "Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside."

The Day of Resurrection sees also the return of the spirit from God; and thus becomes the Day of universal restitution, when the entire personality is reintegrated and renewed in its threefold completeness, after an immortal fashion.

All men then enter into their final estate. Those who departed from this life in a right relation to God inherit the things which He has reserved for those that love Him; while those of whom this cannot be said attain at last, in varying degrees, to "a condition of tolerable and useful existence," or to "the position which man held before the Fall." They are without pain or sorrow, are obedient to the Divine law and live in harmony with the Divine will; yet is their obedience and

their felicity after the manner of servants, rather than sons, of the Most High.

Thus the purpose of God is fulfilled in the blessedness of all His creatures; in the revelation of Himself; in the establishment of a Universe harmonious in its being, wherein is no darkness, nor sin, nor any evil thing. The long travail of history is over, and there has been found recompense for all its sorrow; good has come to victory; and the whole Creation has attained its crown of life in the manifestation of the Sons of God.

Now this scheme of the last things is certainly open to criticism. The denial that there is any salvation beyond the grave seems arbitrary, and is so qualified as to leave us in doubt as to its real force. The doctrine that positive penalty is confined to the intermediate state represents the Judgment as the end rather than the beginning of punishment. The idea, also, that the intermediate state is one of mere thought is difficult to grasp. Moreover, no adequate account is given of the process of enlightenment which goes on until the Consummation, and there has its end. Finally, the whole conception that death dissolves personality, and that the dissolution thus effected remains till the Resurrection, is hardly capable of defence. It is to be remembered that Ferguson's teaching makes this dissolution of man's existence to be the logical penalty of sin, involving personal extinction; and yet here it is presented as involving no extinction. Besides, it is

scarcely possible to imagine the mind as acting without will; and yet will belongs to the spiritual part which is at death separated from the soul. The question also suggests itself: What happens to the spirit when it returns to God? Does it lose personal consciousness? An affirmative answer to this question would be inconsistent with Dr. Ferguson's conception of spirit as "self-conscious, free, and indestructible." And yet an affirmative answer would seem to imply that a sense of personal identity can be retained apart from those powers of thought and memory which the soul alone is said to exercise.

These are real difficulties; but they are so obvious that the author of the theology to which they adhere can hardly have failed to observe them. The truth is that Dr. Ferguson, like all mystics, thought largely in symbols. Of course all thought is symbolic, especially all religious thought. But the mystical mind is given to the use of imagery in a characteristic degree: witness the Jewish apocalyptic seers; also Philo, St. Paul, St. John, Tauler, Boehme, Swedenborg. When intellects of this type create a theology it is usually better to call it a theosophy. Their dialectic presents itself to them in the glowing forms of the imagination. It is probable, then, that if we were to strip Ferguson's statement of its peculiar forms it would mean that, as some kind of embodiment is essential to finite personality, the disembodied state cannot be one of fully-orbed existence; that after death, nevertheless, all

souls are so open to the light and grace of God that, whether in a state of punishment or of salvation, they are subject to the illuminating, winning, and transforming influences of Divine love, and are thus led, in ways which we cannot know, into such a condition of thought that they are constrained to choose the good, or having chosen it before, to receive it perfectly; that, being thus persuaded by the self-evidencing power of goodness, they freely embrace the purpose of God, with gladness accept what is appointed for them by His just and holy will; and so, becoming one with the Divine mind, they enter into eternal peace, and are prepared to devote the full measure of their restored personality to that joyous service of the Most High in which is the fruition of all created life.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROSECUTION BEGINS.

In the preceding chapters of this book an endeavour has been made to give some account of the prosecutions for heresy which occurred in Scotland during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and to show the relation of these to the Fergus Ferguson controversies. Also, the story of the Dalkeith Case has been told, and its issue in the movement for Creed Revision has been indicated. It has been shown, further, how this movement involved its leader in an accusation of teaching unsound doctrine. And, finally, there has been presented an exposition of the teaching thus impugned. It is now our business to set forth a narrative of the ecclesiastical impeachment and trial which was the result of Ferguson's attempt to reform theology, and to end the relation which had hitherto existed between his Church and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I.

The Glasgow Presbytery, in the summer of 1877, found itself confronted by a situation of complicated

perplexities. One of these perplexities was the libel, or indictment, which, as we have seen, had been composed and presented to the Presbytery by an elder; an able lawyer, who appears in the reports of proceedings under the designation of Mr. Wilson. Now, this Mr. Wilson was, as already indicated, a man of character and quality. He showed this by the speed and dexterity with which he constructed his indictment of Ferguson, and he further illustrated it by his subsequent behaviour. The Presbytery had ordered him, in April, to lay his libel on the table and leave it there till it suited the convenience of the Court to determine its fate. He was, moreover, required in the meantime neither to print nor to publish it. This latter requirement, however, was not formally communicated to this gentleman by the Clerk of Presbytery until the end of the month; and even this short delay indicated a failure on the part of that official to understand either the mentality of Mr. Wilson or the rapidity of his methods. For it appeared that this elder had already embodied his document in a tract called *The Confession on the Rock*, and had sent it to the printer, with instructions to dispatch, on the first of May, a copy of it to all the clergy. Mr. Wilson, therefore, regretted that he was unable to obey the commands of the reverend Court. *The Confession on the Rock* had been printed, and would certainly be published. From this position he could not be persuaded to retire. The writer has examined this "Rock," and it has seemed to him hard and barren

enough ; but its creator had looked upon it and found it good. He was, therefore, prepared to defend it at all costs.

> "Come one, come all ! this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I!"

Moreover, the Committee, which had meantime been appointed to examine Ferguson's teaching, found that Mr. Wilson was resolved to abide by his libel and to prosecute it before the Presbytery ; absolutely refusing to withdraw it. Here, then, was a pretty state of things : an elder had laid an indictment against a clergyman, and would not accede to the request of authority that he should depart from it ; he had also been ordered to keep it secret, but had nevertheless spread it abroad. And so, a libel which was technically "lying on the table" was actually roving at large throughout the country, working mischief.

But the chief perplexity in the situation was Ferguson himself. He was one of the best preachers in the Church, and had charge of one of its leading congregations ; he wielded much influence, and commanded the sympathies of a multitude ; he was undeniably a man of lofty character and great ability, and a formidable force in public debate. Moreover, he had a wide reputation among the clergy, and many would feel their own positions compromised if he were condemned. He was, too, in a restive and militant mood, ready to withdraw from the denomination if he found his freedom limited and his honour compromised ; also, it was well

known that his people were, as we have seen, prepared to follow him should he feel it necessary to secede. Besides, it was highly inconvenient for the Presbytery to prosecute him that year; for he was a member of the Revision Committee, and so was, in a manner, constituted a judge of the very Confession by which he must be tried. Further, there was a manifest difficulty in proceeding to test a man's orthodoxy by appeal to a standard which itself, as Ferguson said, "belonged to the category of suspected things." In addition to all this, the Presbytery had no experience of heresy cases; not one of its clerical members had ever constructed a libel or taken any part in a prosecution. Altogether, the situation was one of peculiar embarrassment, such as perhaps had never before confronted a reverend Court. The members of that Court were being asked to attack a man whom they knew and liked, with a lethal weapon which they had never handled, in defence of a Creed which was under suspicion, and to an issue which none could foretell.

But necessity knows no law, even when it is embodied in a lawyer; and it did seem that Mr. Wilson had the power to coerce the Presbytery. At least, he held a position of great strategical strength; and he was resolved to pursue his advantage. The Court, indeed, made many efforts to resist him; but these were not wholly successful. It passed a resolution reprimanding him for his disobedience; but he replied that he cared for its reprimands no more than for "so many drops of

rain on his umbrella." It then insisted on his expressing regret for having published his libel; but he complied with this demand in a very dubious way, asserting that the Presbytery's own incompetence was the cause of his error. "You," said he, "are the Jeroboams that have caused innocent me to sin." Finally, many hours were spent in endeavours to persuade Mr. Wilson to withdraw his libel; and he ultimately agreed to do this, but only on the condition that the Court consented to take up the case and to carry it to a satisfactory issue. If this condition were not accepted, he declared his intention to prosecute the libel himself, and appeal, if necessary, to the Synod.

Now, it may be said that the Presbytery should have defied this elder, and refused to make terms with him of any kind whatever; and so, perhaps, it should. But, then, if it had taken this course, it would have become the scene of a long prosecution conducted by a layman, an amateur in theology, and an extreme Calvinist; and thus it might have presented during many months a spectacle of derision, and been the daily sport of the Philistines. Also, the Synod might have taken a severe view of its policy. Besides, the brethren certainly held the conviction that Ferguson was a good deal more orthodox than he seemed; and they hoped that, if Mr. Wilson's libel were out of the way, they would be able to argue and persuade their brother into such concession as might lead to an honourable peace. They, therefore, accepted in the

end the bargain proposed by this determined elder: his obnoxious document accordingly disappeared from the table of the Court; and the Presbytery went on to formulate and pursue its own declared policy of conciliation and of compromise.

II.

The first thing that the Presbytery did was, of course, to appoint a Committee. The United Presbyterian Church always had a peculiar liking for this mode of procedure. In every difficulty, especially of a theological kind, its habit was to remit the matter to a small number of men, with instructions to investigate, to deliberate, and to report. Those thus chosen were involved in labour and responsibility; but they were also invested with much power, for it was seldom that their decision failed to secure the approval of the Court that appointed them. So that the deliverance of a Presbytery, and even of the Synod, was quite often simply the finding of a few trusted persons who had worked out their conclusions in private consultation. No doubt, this mode of solving problems was common in some degree to all the Presbyterian Communions, but it was more prevalent in the Church with which we are here concerned than in the Establishment or the Free Church. MacLeod Campbell was not handed over to a Committee for the consideration of his case, nor was Robertson Smith; but Morison was,

and also Macrae and Ferguson. This fondness of United Presbyterian Courts for the method of trial by delegation is to be explained, perhaps, by the circumstances of the Church's youth, when its congregations were few and far apart, when travelling was slow and difficult, when, therefore, frequent meetings of Presbytery were almost beyond the range of possibility. But, however this may have been, the practice in question had seldom good results; and of this Ferguson, who had more experience of its working than any other man, was firmly persuaded. In the course of the Dalkeith troubles he had, as we have seen, suffered many things at the hands of many Committees and was none the better of the affliction but rather the worse. And at the beginning of the Glasgow tribulation he found himself, to his dismay, face to face with a repetition of that doleful experience. For no sooner had Mr. Wilson produced his libel than a Committee was formed to examine the speech on which that libel was founded. And again, when Mr. Wilson withdrew his indictment, a Committee was appointed anew, to meet with Ferguson and question him and discover his real opinions.

Now, there can be no doubt that, in adopting this method, the Presbytery had the friendliest intentions. They thought that a little "brotherly" conference would dissolve misunderstanding and settle the whole Case. But to the carrying out of this well-meant policy Ferguson presented an invincible opposition. He did not doubt the goodwill of his brethren; but then

they had never been before Committees, while he had been before a number of them. They had never been argued and bewildered into subscribing illogical articles; he had. They thought that a private conference with a man meant a genial talk with him; but he knew that it became a process of inquisitorial questioning. He would have none of it. Never again would he be examined in private on "the whole circle of theology." Never again would he run the risk of being persuaded into doubtful compromise. There should be no recurrence of the episode of the Four Propositions.

In accordance with this resolution, Ferguson wrote to Dr. David Young, Convener of the Committee, courteously but finally refusing to meet with it. If interrogations were submitted to him in writing, with Presbyterial authority, he would try to answer them in open Court. But he did not desire to have them put to him in private, nor in private would he reply to them. In face of this perfectly legal and legitimate attitude, the Committee could do nothing else than report to the Presbytery; which directed them to send certain questions to Ferguson, "couched, as far as possible, in Confessional language," and ask him to discuss them at an appointed meeting of the Court.

The following document was, therefore, forwarded to the minister of Queen's Park congregation:

"1. Does Mr. Ferguson believe that 'in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons,' and not merely

that the same Personal Being manifests Himself under three different forms ?

" 2. Does he believe that ' the moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof ? '

" 3. Does he believe that ' man by his fall into a state of sin hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation ' so that a ' natural man is not able by his own strength to convert himself ' ?

" 4. Does he believe that every sin, ' being a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary thereunto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner ' and condemnation ?

" 5. Does he believe that ' Christ by His obedience and death ' ' did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice ? '

" 6. Does he believe that sinners are justified, ' not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone,' through faith in Him ?

" 7. Does he believe in the ' Covenant of Grace ' ' made with Christ as the second Adam,' under which the ' Grace of God is manifested,' and the salvation of Christ's people secured ?

" 8. Does he ascribe salvation to an ' eternal and immutable purpose ' of God formed ' out of His mere free grace and love,' so that a people ' chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory ' are through Christ alone and infallibly saved.

III.

In fulfilment, then, of the promise he had given, Ferguson appeared at the meeting of Presbytery in September 1877 and proceeded to offer his replies to the questions indicated. The speech in which he

embodied these answers was one of great dignity and power, and of excellent fighting quality; and, had space permitted, might well have been printed here in full. Many quotations, however, have been made from it in preceding pages, and it embodied the theology which has been already set forth. Certain passages in it may, nevertheless, be given, as they indicate salient features of the speaker's thought, and at the same time illustrate the perplexities which the Presbytery experienced in understanding his system and in dealing with his case.

He began by stating that he had agreed to answer these interrogations, because he desired, if possible, to spare the Court the trouble of libelling him. But, at the same time, he failed to see what end could be served by putting to him questions stated in terms of the Confession, since that document was itself under suspicion, and since he was avowedly in revolt against it. It was evident that a catechism of this sort could test the orthodoxy neither of him nor of any other man.

"What, then, are these propositions designed to effect? They cannot test my orthodoxy or that of any other person. The Church is not at this moment in possession of a truly immaculate and orthodox confession; and it is precisely because I wish to see the Church in possession of such a formula, and able thereby to determine what orthodoxy and heterodoxy are, that I plead for nothing less than a reconstruction of the Creed."

In this statement we find the expression of the invincible idealism which imbued Ferguson with the belief that a perfect statement of the Faith was possible, and ought to be the object of untiring endeavour. Nor was this a mere abstract or academic conviction, since he lived and toiled all his days for its realisation. At the same time, he suggested a definition of orthodoxy which amazed the Presbytery and was certainly very broad in its scope.

"What I understand to be the essential notion of orthodox theology is the idea of a Divine order in the universe; not merely a natural order, for that the blindest can perceive, and without it natural science would have no foundation; but an order that grounds itself in the Being of God, such as is open to the eye of faith, and without which spiritual science has no foundation."

This is a definition of orthodoxy which we have described, surely with justice, as "broad"; and its identification of faith with thought was essential to Ferguson's whole way of thinking. This is illustrated in the following striking utterance:

"To think properly is to draw right inferences from accurately ascertained facts. It is to pass from the seen to the unseen. The meaning of a thing is the idea, invisible to sense, which lies at the core of the visible. He who thinks is one who traces a fact to its principle, and groups the multiform phenomena around the uniform law. Hence the true Christian is the only true thinker; for he is the man who walks by faith, and not by sight: that is, he is ever interpreting the

visible in the higher light of the invisible ; and looking not at the things that are seen and temporal, but at those which are unseen and eternal. This is the act of reason, properly so-called. It is the joyous and victorious intuitive flash, which leaps the dark abyss of contradiction ; the 'terrible crystal,' or wedge of light, which pierces for evermore between the true and the false."

Of the same mystical kind is a saying of his regarding the nature of man :

"Now man is threefold, and God is threefold. Man, as a dying bodily existence, is separated from God the Father, as the Creator of his body. Man, as a living intellectual existence, returns to God the Son, as the enlightener of his soul. Man, as an immortal spiritual existence, dwells in unity with God the Spirit, as the regenerator of his spirit."

Now, these quotations suffice to indicate the kind of answers which Ferguson was certain to give when confronted with theological questions founded on the Confession. There was a great gulf fixed between his mentality and that of the Westminster Divines. In essentials, of course, he and they alike were Christians and, therefore, in some kind of harmony. But the intellectual world in which the modern mystic dwelt was as far from that inhabited by the Puritan Calvinists as the South Pole is distant from the North. They spoke different tongues, they thought in different symbols, they approached every problem of faith from different standpoints. The attempt, therefore, to recon-

cile them was from the first foredoomed to the failure which actually befell it. A mystic striving to explain himself to a United Presbyterian Court, which endeavoured still to be loyal to Confessional forms of thought, presented a spectacle that may be described as pathos touched with humour.

It is inadvisable, as has been said, to attempt a full account of the answers which Ferguson gave to the eight questions of the Presbytery. Those who have read the preceding chapter would hold such an account to be tedious, and those who have not read that chapter would find these answers unintelligible. One or two extracts may, however, be given which refer to points of especial importance. Thus, the speaker referred in the following terms to criticisms of his statement that "*God is the same personal Being, under three forms of absolute self-manifestation*":

"The Presbytery seems to think that such a statement involves one in a suspicious proximity to Unitarianism, Sabellianism, or some other heresy. They seem to think that personality is something more than or different from self-manifestation. If it be so, I shall be extremely delighted to hear what it is. But as the term is not defined in the Confession or by the Presbytery, I have been under the necessity of defining it for myself, and the conclusion to which I have come is that the very essence of personality is self-manifestation. My objection to the dogma as formulated in the Confession is that, strictly interpreted, it is pantheistic in its ground and tritheistic in its form. It grounds the whole notion of Deity in substance, power,

and eternity. But these words do not denote the elements of personal being at all, and, therefore, as wanting a personal ground, the dogma is pantheistic. The result of this is that three distinct persons, differing as persons, and alike only in that which is impersonal, are actually three separate beings, or three Gods."

Again, as to *the relation of grace and law*, he said :

"I maintain that the fundamental and primary notion of human existence is that man stands on a footing of grace as well as of law, and that both grace and law in perfect harmony have entered into the ground of his relation to God all along the path of his history."

Once more, he thus guards himself from appearing to teach *Conditional Immortality*.

"If we are dealing with sin as an abstraction, then I say that sin is the dissolution of the universe. But this antagonism to goodness, which we call sin, and which only too evidently exists, has not been permitted to resolve all things into this abyss of annihilation. And why ? Because the Author of the universe continually interposes to prevent such an issue. It is true, therefore, as a hypothetical case, that if the Author of the universe did not sustain a living relation to the whole, sin would have been the ruin of the universe. But seeing that God does interpose, it is not true in actual fact 'that every sin doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner and condemnation'—meaning by condemnation as distinguished from guilt, the final doom or penalty of sin, as distinguished from mere liability to punishment."

As to the *ground of condemnation*, he stated a doctrine

which had been held by both MacLeod Campbell and Morison, and was taught also by Dale of Birmingham.

"My answer to this fourth question, therefore, is: I do not believe, in view of Christ's death, that there is now any other ground of human condemnation in the sight of God but unbelief in Christ."

His teaching as to *Justification* is notable:

"I believe the righteousness of Christ to be the only ground on which man can be accepted in the sight of God; but by the righteousness of Christ I mean conformity to the will of God, as wrought out, in and through the being of man; which is only another way of saying that Christ's righteousness must be realised in us before we can be justified."

Finally, he thus defined his doctrine of *ultimate destiny*:

"I am asked if I regard the Divine purpose as a something formed out of God's mere free grace and love. I answer that I prefer to think of it, not as a something formed out of something else, such as a particular quality or aspect of the Divine Being, but, as the Scriptures put it, as something which God purposed *in Himself*, or in harmony with His whole Being, and, therefore, comprehensive of His Being. I am asked if I look upon this purpose as securing the salvation of a chosen section of the human race alone. I answer that God's love, in the gift of His Son to be the Saviour of the world, embraced the whole world, and must, therefore, have an aspect of blessing in relation to all men, within which there are higher heights of blessedness for those who are faithful to God now, as distinguished from those who die in impenitence and sin."

Such, then, were some of the features of this important speech, which was in some respects so audacious, and yet was of such impressiveness and was so evidently fraught with evangelic passion that the Presbytery, when it was ended, were not quite sure whether to be satisfied or not. Indeed, so uncertain were they as to their own state of mind, and so divided in opinion, that they resorted once more to their familiar refuge in every time of trouble, a Committee. Dr. Young and his colleagues were directed to examine the speech, and in due season to report their opinion of it to the Presbytery.

As we have now made some little progress with our task of unravelling the complicated tangle of Committee operations, it may be well to warn the reader that a great part of all that Mr. Ferguson and his brethren did and attempted during the closing months of 1877 can never be related. We can tell the story of such proceedings only as took place in open Court and were regularly reported. But, of course, there were many personal interviews and private meetings of Presbytery which were not within the ken of the newspapers. Of these no accounts are available; yet they certainly had much to do with the development of the Case and with the attitude adopted by individual ecclesiastics. Concerning one of these private conferences an amusing incident is related. It was pointed out that, since the record of this conference would be read to the Court at a sederunt when reporters would

be present, its doings would in effect become as well known as if it had itself been held in public. To this, the Clerk, a man both genial and masterful, replied: "Leave that to me." Accordingly, when the next ordinary meeting of Presbytery took place, the Clerk proceeded to read the minutes of the private discussion; but in performing this task he developed an indistinctness of utterance and a rapidity of speech so marked that there reached the ears of the reporters little more than an inarticulate torrent of words; certain familiar phrases alone being clearly heard, such as "Mr. Ferguson," "the Committee"; "the Committee," "Mr. Ferguson." These perfectly plain but quite unilluminating expressions appeared here and there like corks on the bosom of a hurrying stream. But as to what "the Committee" had said or "Mr. Ferguson" had replied, no information whatever was given. No doubt the representatives of the Press understood the situation very well; for reporters are men of experience and of humanity. They shrugged their shoulders and rested their pencils and waited till the tide of incoherence rolled by. In any case, this story, which at least has verisimilitude, illustrates the truth that of all history much "remaineth unrevealed." The best historian is he who conjectures most shrewdly the nature of unknown quantities.

IV.

When the report of this Committee was presented, in October, it was found to be very adverse to Mr. Ferguson. The Convener, in the course of a long and acute speech, declared the answers of their brother to be, in his opinion and that of his colleagues, "unsatisfactory." Some of them were worse than others, but all of them were theologically bad. Dr. Young even went so far as to say that the author of the speech under review had "surrendered the evangelical faith" as to Justification and Atonement. He said, also, that neither the Committee nor the Presbytery had any power to test Mr. Ferguson's position by any other standard than the Confession. It was true that the Synod had appointed a Committee to review the relation of the Church to its Creed, but they must not forget that it had at the same time declared its continued adherence to "the system of doctrine contained in the Confession"; and it could not be doubted that judged by that system of doctrine Mr. Ferguson's theology stood condemned. As to the demand of the latter that his teaching should be tested by appeal to the Scriptures, Dr. Young declared this to be "a quite impracticable" proposal. He was persuaded, for his own part, that Mr. Ferguson's teaching was unscriptural; but that question was not their concern. "The matter before us is not the harmony of Mr. Ferguson's views with the Divine Word. The matter before us is

the harmony of his views with the system of doctrine contained in our Confession and Catechisms . . . and it is perfectly plain, and admitted by Mr. Ferguson himself, that his views are not consistent with the system of doctrine contained in these Standards." He, therefore, moved that "the Presbytery, having carefully considered Mr. Ferguson's statement, find it unsatisfactory"; and this became the verdict of the Court.

Now the doctrine laid down in the latter part of this speech clearly involved the existence of three separate Standards: the Bible, the Confession, and an undefined system of doctrine contained in the Confession. It is plain, also, that if it is "impracticable" to test a man's orthodoxy by Scripture, it is even more "impracticable" to test it by reference to "the system of doctrine contained in the Confession." For any attempt to state that system would have revealed the fact that there was no agreement as to what it was. One might as well propose to define the contour of a hill by comparing it with the outline of a shifting mass of cloud, as seek to determine the soundness of any teaching by appeal to a vague dogmatic entity which presented a varying aspect to varying minds. If the Presbytery had been asked to say what the essential theology of the Confession was, what were the parts of its doctrine that every loyal minister must accept, there would have been heard at once a Babel of discordant voices. It was, therefore, as certain as anything could be that if Ferguson were brought to trial, the libel would be based

on the actual language of the Confession, and not on what Dr. Young, or anyone else, thought to be its substance as distinct from its form.

Of this the Presbytery were well aware, and were the more eager to avoid a prosecution which, in the circumstances, must present to the world an aspect of unfairness. And the only device they could think of which offered the least chance of success was the appointment of another Committee. In resorting to this expedient they exhibited the courage which continues to hope in spite of experience. But the man whom they appointed Convener of this new Committee, Dr. Joseph Leckie, harboured no illusions as to the matter; he was not confident that good results could be expected from further private conference, and he told the Presbytery so. He also indicated his unwillingness to assume the Convenership, on the ground that he was an old friend of Mr. Ferguson, was opposed to his prosecution, and was unwilling to assume official relations, of a more or less legal kind, with a man whom he knew so well and with whom he had so much sympathy. In the long run, however, Dr. Leckie's objections were overruled, and he consented to undertake the task proposed; though he did so with little hope, and mainly to prevent the matter passing into less friendly hands.

And so in the end our much-enduring "heretic" was called anew to undergo an experience which, above all others, he disliked. After his many labours and strivings, after his repeated and painful efforts to fulfil the

Presbytery's demands, he saw himself exposed once more to a prolonged process of futile questioning. He was to be asked to explain himself again to men who already knew his position thoroughly; he was to be personally conducted on a tour of the whole theological continent by a reluctant Committee, whose Convener himself did not expect to discern anything new or helpful on the journey. We cannot wonder that he did all he could to escape this ordeal, and to spare himself and his brethren a task which he knew, and they feared, would be fruitless. To this end he took certain successive steps. In the first place, he protested, and in the second place, he submitted the following statement of his personal beliefs, hoping thereby to satisfy the Court:

"In general, I believe the system of sound doctrine to be that system that traces everything that is good to God, and that dates and derives in thought everything from the point of an eternal purpose in God, of which creation, providence, and redemption are the one free, manifold, and self-consistent manifestation. More particularly, I believe in the three primary truths of natural religion: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the responsibility of man. I believe also in the three corresponding truths of revealed religion: the divinity of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the last judgment. Still more particularly, I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Saviour of the World. And that declaration I look upon as involving the following particulars: the incarnation of Christ, as involving the truth concerning the Trinity; the holiness of Christ, as involving the

truth that the spirit of His life is the law of our life; the voluntary death of Christ, as involving the truth as to the atoning character of His whole work; the resurrection of Christ, as involving the resurrection of all men, with the sonship and eternal life of believers; and the heavenly reign of Christ, as involving the ultimate subjugation of all things to His sway. I humbly submit this statement as the basis on which I am entitled to receive an unqualified expression of confidence from the Presbytery as to my soundness in the faith."

This is a statement which will be found on examination to be a model of condensed and lucid exposition; but the Court received it with that chilly silence which has an unmistakable significance for anyone who is sensitive to the "atmosphere" of an audience. Ferguson, therefore, disheartened and exasperated, took the final step of demanding a libel, that is to say, a regular trial according to the law of the Church. Also, he said, in response to a challenge, that he would consent to be tried by the Westminster Standards. "Dr. Young has remarked, 'If Mr. Ferguson is unwilling to be tried by the Confession, let him say so.' Well, I am not unwilling."

Now this latter concession was a grave tactical mistake, and justified the action of Dr. Leckie, who had risen before Mr. Ferguson made his statement and had protested against his being heard, on the ground that he would be apt, in the heat of the moment, to say things that might place him in a false position. And certainly in agreeing to be judged by the Confession, he did put himself in a position which was

"false" in the sense that it was indefensible. For he had never professed agreement with the Westminster Creed; indeed, his entire dialectic was directed against its doctrine. What hope, then, could there be of his being acquitted if he were tried on the basis proposed? This was so evident that Ferguson afterwards withdrew from this untenable ground and made his appeal to the Scriptures, but the effect of his unfortunate declaration did, none the less, remain.

But the Court was still most unwilling to proceed to extremities. It could not, indeed, refuse the demand for a libel, which was the immemorial right of all Presbyterian ministers in Ferguson's situation. It was not prepared to perpetrate the injustice which was afterwards inflicted on Macrae and Robertson Smith, who were both denied a formal trial by the Supreme Courts of their respective Churches.[1] But it insisted on delaying the further prosecution of the Case; and directed the Committee to proceed with its task of reconciliation. And this was done, be it noted, in face of the Convener's protest that the demand for a libel had made an end of private conference.

V.

Into the history of the unhappy negotiations which followed it is unnecessary to enter at any length. The

[1] This statement, as to Robertson Smith, refers, of course, to his second prosecution.

policy of the Committee was at first that of Fabius Cunctator: masterly inactivity. It may be said to have taken, for its motto, Tennyson's saying, "My faith is large in time." It hoped that a period of healing silence would allow an atmosphere which had become heated by much controversy to cool to a less dangerous level. The Convener, therefore, announced to two successive meetings of Presbytery that there was nothing to report. When at length he did make a statement, in February 1878, he contented himself with reading a correspondence which showed that Mr. Ferguson had refused to meet his Committee except on the basis of a document setting forth the points of complaint against him; that when such a document had been framed he had objected to it on the ground that it was stated in Confessional language; that a second statement had then been produced which was not open in the same degree to this objection; that in response to this latter formula he had printed a paper called "Additional Statements in Defence of my Doctrinal Position," and had submitted this to the Committee as indicating the ground on which he was prepared to confer; that to this proposal the Committee was unable to agree, as it would have carried them beyond their instructions; and that, as the result of all this, no conference had been held, and the Committee had totally failed to achieve the purpose for which it had been appointed.

On this report being presented, Mr. Ferguson justified

his refusal to take part in a purely informal discussion, on the ground that he had learned by experience the unsatisfactory results of "entrusting such important matters to the frail and shifting basis of mere conversation." For this reason he had asked that the subjects of conference should be defined in writing. He had objected to such definitions being couched in terms of the Confession, because he held that no one had a right, under present circumstances, to expect conformity to the letter of the Creed. In reply to the amended questions of the Committee he had composed and published a statement of his positions, and had suggested this as the foundation of further discussion, because he hoped thereby to facilitate the work of his brethren. But the Committee had refused this proposal, which had seemed to him a fair one. For the rest, he said that the Synod had appointed him a member of the Revision Committee, knowing quite well his opinions; and that he had stated to that Revision Committee, without rebuke, all that he had said to the Presbytery. He failed to see, then, why the Presbytery should propose to prosecute him, or should even hold him in theological suspicion, on account of a doctrine which a Synodical Board had heard with equanimity and tolerance.

All this appears to us so reasonable and sound that we are disposed to marvel at the course which the Presbytery pursued. Surely they might well, at this point, have asked Mr. Ferguson to withdraw his demand

for a libel, or else have deferred further prosecution till the relation of the Church to the Creed had been determined by the Supreme Court. This latter policy was, indeed, advocated by some of Ferguson's friends; but these were only wandering voices which found no response in the minds of the brethren. Dr. Joseph Brown then proposed that the whole matter be remitted back to the Committee with instructions to confer with the accused on the basis of his printed Statement. But this motion was decisively rejected; probably because the document mentioned had been read and pondered by the members of Presbytery, and had failed to commend itself to most of them. It appeared to them to be, as indeed it was, an elaborate exposition, in a very uncompromising form, of Ferguson's characteristic doctrines; and it certainly presented nowhere any suggestion of withdrawal or compromise. So far was it from doing this that it afforded, rather, a final proof, at least to the conservatives, that Ferguson was a heretic indeed. It made an end of doubt and conjecture in their minds, and established instead a gloomy conviction that their brother was even less orthodox than they had supposed. As those who held this view of things were a majority of the Court, there remained no further hope of treading the pathway of peace. The period of negotiation was over; the reign of law had begun. Ferguson was therefore formally suspended from the exercise of his ministerial office, according to the law of the Church; and the Clerk

was instructed to draft a libel against him, and to submit it to the Presbytery within a given time.

VI.

Thus ended the long and weary regime of Committees and Conferences, which had lasted for nine painful months. During all this time an unwilling Court had been drifting slowly towards the position in which it now stood. To libel Fergus Ferguson had never been its desire or purpose. It had acted at first under the domination of one resolute elder, who had secured from it a promise to carry this case to an issue. It had made this promise in the confident hope that it would be able to persuade the "heretic" to offer such explanations as might satisfy his opponents. But in this hope it had been disappointed through the determination and conviction of the man with whom it had to deal. And so, step by step, it had been led to the reluctant admission that there was no way of ending the matter except by a formal prosecution. In all this, we repeat, it had been actuated in the main by the best motives. But, none the less, the effect of its policy had been disastrous. The long-continued discussion had led to the formation of parties and the hardening of opinion. The protracted process of inquisition and questioning through Committees had created exasperation and suspicion. And the total result was that the case was really decided before it had properly been begun.

Ere ever the Clerk had put his pen to paper in the laborious task of composing his libel, every member of the Court had heard all that there was to hear about the Fergusonian doctrine, had listened to every argument that could be advanced, and had of necessity formed his opinion of the whole. So far as the ends of abstract justice were concerned, the question might as well have been put at once: Is this man a heretic or is he not? Such are often the sorrowful results of informal conferences and methods of conciliation. But, inasmuch as it behoved the Presbytery to fulfil all righteousness, Dr. Jeffrey had to frame his libel, and, count by count, it had to be discussed. Thus, after sundry creakings and complaints, as of an old piece of mechanism, rusty through long disuse, the ecclesiastical machine began slowly to grind out its decisions, 'midst the sound of many voices and the scrapings of many pens.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIBEL.

I.

Mrs. Oliphant, in her *Life of Edward Irving*, criticises somewhat severely the Presbyterian method of conducting a Heresy Case. She, in fact, affirms that Scottish ecclesiastical Courts are less fair in their procedure and less just in their judgments than secular Tribunals; that whereas a man accused of crime, or appearing as defendant in a civil action, is reasonably sure of being equitably tried by a judge and jury, a clergyman arraigned for unorthodox opinions has no corresponding certainty of receiving impartial and dispassionate treatment at the hands of a Presbytery or a Synod or a General Assembly. She does not conceal her opinion that these Church Courts, being popular in constitution and unfamiliar with the laws of evidence, are apt to be swayed by motives of policy and party, and to be guided in their decisions rather by personal and emotional forces than by considerations of law and equity.

Perhaps it may be granted that the censures of this able and acute writer are a little exaggerated, being

partly inspired by the resentment with which she remembered some features in the trial of Edward Irving. But it must be admitted that the Presbyterian system of government is not seen at its best in its administration of theological discipline. Its achievements in the judicial sphere have not always been fitted to secure the respect or confidence of men. The mere fact that every case of formal prosecution on a doctrinal charge has resulted in the condemnation of the accused is in itself a grave reproach; for it is incredible that the conservative party in the Church has always been in the right, and the "heretics" always in the wrong. What should we think of a secular Court which never gave a verdict of acquittal? Yet such is the singular record of Presbyterian justice, during at least one hundred years: throughout that long period no single case of alleged heresy, *which has reached the stage of libel*, has issued *finally* in the vindication of the defender.[1] This singular feature of Presbyterian history we have ventured to call a reproach; but lest this be counted too strong an expression, let us describe it, rather, as a ground of suspicion. To this phrase, at least, no exception can be taken; for we certainly do have reason to suspect the efficiency of a method of inquiry

[1] This statement will be found correct, if attention be given to the words italicised. Dr. John Brown was acquitted, but he was not *formally tried by libel*. This is true also of Drs. Dods, Bruce, and W. C. Smith. Robertson Smith was libelled and acquitted, but *finally* dismissed from his Chair. Macrae was deposed without libel. Campbell, Irving, Morison, Wright, Ferguson, Robinson were all found guilty as libelled.

which invariably comes to a conclusion in favour of the *status quo*. And this suspicion is unfortunately confirmed when we remember that all the several condemnations referred to, except perhaps in the Kilmun Case, have been reversed by the verdict of history. Who, at the present time, will venture to affirm that MacLeod Campbell was unfit to be a minister of the Scottish Kirk, or that Irving was guilty of serious error, or that Wright was fairly treated, or that the doctrines of Macrae were certainly erroneous, or that Ferguson deserved censure, or that Robertson Smith was justly penalised? Surely there must be a defect in the procedure of Courts whose findings are so seldom confirmed by the course of later thought. Experience does thus seem to show that, while Presbyterianism supplies an excellent organ of general administration, it does not create an efficient instrument of theological justice.

It is remarkable that the Church of England has, in this matter, a record so different from that of the Presbyterian Kirks. The Privy Council Authorities have not shown the uniform conservatism of the Scottish Ecclesiastical Courts; they have often decided in favour of the "heretics"; and the wisdom of their judgments has, as a rule, been recognised by later opinion. The issue of the Gorham Case vindicated the positions of the Evangelicals; the verdict in favour of the Bishop of Lincoln secured a reasonable liberty for the High Church party; and the decisions in *Fendall* v. *Wilson* and in the Rowland Williams prosecution

gave a like enfranchisement to the Liberals. Thus has been established a measure of freedom for all types of Anglican thought, which the tolerant genius of the English people rightly approves. It is true that the removal from his professorial Chair of Frederick Denison Maurice was an act of injustice parallel to the dismissal of Robertson Smith. But this was the doing, not of the Anglican authorities, but of an academic Board. Tennyson, for instance, in his famous verses to Maurice, written at the time of the latter's condemnation, made no charge against the Church, but wrote :

> "Should eighty-thousand *college-councils*
> Thunder 'Anathema,' friend, at you."

Again, it is true that the Rev. Charles Voysey was deposed from the ministry of the Church of England on a charge of heresy ; but this was a judgment entirely fair. Voysey had taken up a position far beyond that of ordinary Unitarianism, being a pure Theist, and no Communion which adhered to historical Christianity could have failed to convict him on the evidence adduced. On the whole, therefore, it must be recognised that the Anglican fashion of dealing with men accused of heresy has proved itself in practice more just, more liberal, and more in accord with reality than have the methods of the Presbyterian Church.

Various reasons for this may be advanced. It may be said, for instance, that the English mind has a genius for accommodation which is foreign to the more logical

and unyielding temperament of the Scots; but whatever truth may be in this suggestion must be qualified by the remembrance that the Puritan and Calvinistic tradition has proved itself no more friendly to compromise in the Southern than in the Northern Kingdom. The true explanation of the comprehensiveness of the Church of England is probably to be found in the circumstance that it was established on a basis of conciliation, and that its Prayer Book was designed for the use of people who adhered substantially to the old Catholic forms of faith, as well as of those who accepted the Reformed theology in its entirety. The High Church party and the Evangelicals have always had to live together within the same Communion. Hence has been created a habit of tolerance which has resisted all the attacks of logic. Neither of the great theological parties has been permitted to eject the other, since the position of both is secured by history and the Book of Common Prayer. And the third party of the Liberals has profited by this state of things, inasmuch as an endeavour to destroy it would have disturbed the equilibrium of the whole. The Liberals have also been aided by the fortunate circumstance that the Thirty-nine Articles make no pronouncement on the doctrine of Final Destiny. To all this there must be added the fact that trials for heresy in the Anglican Church have been decided, as to their issue, by trained legal minds, accustomed to the weighing of evidence and little disposed towards an excess of dogmatic zeal.

The Scottish Churches, on the other hand, have been required to determine every question as to the orthodoxy of a clergyman by reference to the Confession of Faith, which is, indeed, a document of compromise, but of compromise only between different types of Calvinism. Tried by such a standard no man can possibly be acquitted who dissents from the Calvinistic system. And this is, no doubt, the chief reason why formal trials on a heresy charge have so uniformly had an issue hostile to the accused. One might as reasonably expect a Socinian to go uncondemned if he were judged by appeal to the Nicene Creed as expect MacLeod Campbell or Fergus Ferguson to be declared orthodox according to the orthodoxy of the Westminster Divines.

Besides all this, it must be admitted that semi-popular councils like Presbyteries and Assemblies, are ill-adapted to discuss and to decide difficult and abstract questions of theology. These Courts, no doubt, have among their members a considerable company of men really learned in Divinity, but they contain a number of ministers who cannot be so described; and one-half of the whole are elders, who for the most part have had no theological training whatever. And it is impossible to maintain that Courts so constituted, Courts, moreover, in which the same men are both judge and jury, are really competent to decide, by a mere majority of votes, profound metaphysical questions and intricate problems of Scriptural criticism and interpretation. How many of those who voted Robertson

Smith out of his Chair had given as much as a year's study to the questions he raised? What proportion of those who went into the division lobby against Fergus Ferguson had ever seriously faced the problems which confronted him, were aware of the tremendous impact of modern philosophy upon the structure of Calvinistic dogma, or had laboured as long and strenuously as he to build a home of thought in which faith might dwell secure? To say this is not to suggest any criticism upon the conduct or competence of individuals; but it is to indicate a possible explanation of the puzzling fact that the Presbyterian system of government by representative Councils, which has proved itself so effective in nearly every department of ecclesiastical life, has yet signally failed to vindicate its methods in the judicial sphere. It is hardly to be doubted that this failure has been due, partly to the truth that appeal to a purely Calvinistic Confession can never result in the acquittal of a man who is not a Calvinist, and partly to the circumstance that large democratic assemblies are not perfectly designed to fulfil the duties of theological tribunals.

II.

The statement of these criticisms is perfectly relevant to the purposes of this record; for the history of the Ferguson Trial reveals at every step the difficulties of Presbyterian procedure in such cases as this. We have

seen that the Glasgow Presbytery, in February 1878, had reached the conclusion that it must proceed to the prosecution of Fergus Ferguson on the basis of a formal indictment. We have seen also that it made this decision with extreme unwillingness and after spending many months in painful efforts to avoid so grave a task. Nor can we wonder at this reluctance on the part of the reverend Court when we consider the circumstances of the Case and contemplate the Herculean labours which were involved. The Presbytery was probably as competent an assembly of its kind as then existed in Scotland. But it had no experience whatever of such an undertaking as now confronted it; there had been no theological prosecution by libel within the United Presbyterian Church for more than thirty years. Nor was there any precedent in the history of any Scottish Kirk for the framing of so elaborate and comprehensive an indictment as it was now the duty of this Presbytery to construct. Other trials had been concerned with only one or two points of doctrine; but this trial had for its subject-matter practically the whole field of Christian belief. Who, then, can be surprised that the Court shrank from the prospect that opened before it; a prospect of much responsibility, great and unfamiliar exertions, novel adventures, endless debates, precarious excursions into regions of elusive and speculative thought?

So intense was the realisation of these difficulties

among the fathers and brethren, that the Presbytery was forced at the outset into a course of doubtful legality. The law of the Church contemplated the following preliminary steps in such cases: (1) the appointment of Prosecutors to conduct the proceedings against the accused; (2) the framing of a libel by these Prosecutors; (3) the adjustment of the libel by the Court. But, apparently, no one could be found, in the beginning, willing to undertake the burden of prosecution, or the task of preparing the libel. The Presbytery, in these circumstances, asked the Clerk, Dr. George Jeffrey, to construct the indictment and prosecute it; but that gentleman, while he agreed to discharge the first of these duties, absolutely declined to undertake the second. The result was that a libel was framed before responsible Prosecutors had been appointed. This was the first irregularity. The second was that when Dr. Jeffrey produced his libel it was found to require so much "adjustment" that the Court spent three whole days in private debate before they attained agreement as to the matter and form of the document.

This was a grave injustice, to which Ferguson later took exception in the following terms: "This whole Court, which ought to have been perfectly free and utterly impartial, substantially prejudged the whole case, committed itself both to the relevancy and the merits of the libel; and then, having done so, began to look about for prosecutors. An indictment was drawn

up at the instance of nobody, and an accusation was framed when as yet there was no accuser." This was a reasonable complaint, to which no effective answer was given. The only reply attempted was that the Rules did not *enjoin* that prosecutors should be chosen, in the first instance, and entrusted with the composition of the libel: they only affirmed that such a course was "expedient"; the Presbytery, therefore, was entitled to take its own way. But, as Ferguson said, "expediency in such a case amounted to moral necessity," since the method recommended by law was the only one fitted to secure justice to the accused. It was certainly "in the highest degree expedient that justice in a heresy trial should not degenerate into a burlesque of law and equity."

It may be admitted, then, that the Presbytery did take a mistaken course in its method of preparing the indictment, though it was a course adopted under something like constraint of circumstance. And it certainly involved members of the Court in much labour and many troubles. Of this, their three days' debate was itself an illustration. So keen and conscientious, as well as prolonged, was their discussion that the first count in the Clerk's libel, which concerned the doctrine of God, was struck out altogether; other counts were modified; and two of them were incongruously combined so as to form one charge. Of the counts which were thus formally united, the first alleged that Ferguson denied the existence of two Covenants, and the

second complained that he did not admit the distinction between law and grace. Why these were bound together by the Presbytery we do not know; but we may conjecture that the "heresies" in question, when taken separately, appeared so trivial that it was felt necessary to present them in unity, so as to give them the semblance of a respectable theological crime. It seems that even in this guise they failed to present a sufficiently sinister aspect; for in their case, and in theirs alone, the Court afterwards declared the defender guiltless. In any event, the libel, when it assumed its final form, contained only six counts; which related respectively to Atonement, Justification, the two Covenants, etc., the nature of Sin, the condition of fallen Man, and final Destiny. Even as thus amended and compressed, however, it remained a formidable indictment; and it is no reproach to Dr. James Black and the Rev. James Buchanan that they showed but little alacrity in assuming the responsibility of supporting and proving it before the Court.

It is not proposed to present the libel to the reader as a portion of this narrative; but it is printed at the end of the volume for purposes of reference, and in order that an interesting historical paper may not be lost.[1] The document is a quaint, old-world production, full of "whereas's" and antique legal forms of speech. It does credit to Dr. Jeffrey's antiquarian lore, and must have cost him many toilsome hours. It begins

[1] See Appendix: *Libel.*

with the declaration that to promulgate false and unsound doctrine "is a heinous offence and severely punishable." It then goes on to state the various counts of the libel. Each count begins with setting forth in the language of the Prosecutors the doctrine of the Church on the point with which it deals; it then proceeds to say that "it is contrary to the same and an error" to assert an opinion which is then set forth in phrases taken from Ferguson's speeches; it thereafter goes on to present the orthodox belief in terms (1) of Scripture, and (2) of the Confession. When all the charges have been thus made clear, the libel addresses the defender directly: "Yet true it is and of verity that you the said Fergus Ferguson have promulgated the aforesaid errors, and have avowed the same in so far as you have uttered or issued the after-named speech or publications." Then follows a list of Ferguson's writings, and also quotations from these which are fitted to convict him of the alleged errors. And the whole concludes with the affirmation that if this indictment be proven, "it OUGHT to be found and declared that you are deserving of censure, and censure OUGHT to be inflicted on you, according to the law of the Church, for your correction and edification, and in order to deter others from lapsing into similar heresies." And this ominous impeachment is ended with the signature of the official Prosecutors: "James Black, James Buchanan." It is true, as we have seen, that these two gentlemen had no more to do with composing

the libel than anyone else in the Court. Nevertheless, they were, by a legal fiction, its authors; they were formally responsible for it; and they were required to sign it.

Now a libel of this kind is theoretically a magnificent instrument of justice and well designed to secure a fair and thorough trial. But in practice it is found to be an awkward and unwieldy weapon. For one thing, it is unfitted to deal with teaching so subtle and speculative, so systematic and coherent as Ferguson's. It was said of the syllogism that it was *impar subtilitati naturæ*, "inadequate to the complexity of nature." And so it may be said of the libel that it is unequal to the subtlety and elaboration of the Fergusonian doctrine. Quotations taken here and there from the writings and speeches of such a man are apt to convey a false impression of his thought; and the bare statement of an orthodox position over against such quotations is misleading. Moreover, the system of trial by libel involves two stages of process. The first is concerned with *relevancy*; that is to say, with the question whether the errors alleged would amount to heresy if proved, and whether the evidence adduced is fitted to show that the doctrines said to be unsound are really so. In the second stage, that of *probation*, the prosecution is required to show that the accused is actually guilty of the false teaching set forth. And this is a very logical arrangement. But when it is put to the test of debate it sometimes invests proceedings with an air of unreality;

it is found to be impossible of fulfilment ; its first and second stages become confused together. For instance, in Ferguson's case, it was ruled that the speakers, in arguing the matter of relevancy, must not mention even the accused's name ; must confine themselves to an abstract discussion as to whether the opinions alleged were heresies, without reference to the circumstance that a man was in fact being tried for teaching them, and, further, that they were expressed in Ferguson's own words.

Now, it is true that this ruling was formally accurate ; for the writer is assured on excellent legal authority that no judge would permit allusion to the accused in the course of any discussion as to the relevance of an indictment. But methods that are suited to civil trials, which are conducted by experts, are not easily enforced under conditions of semi-popular debate, such as obtain in Presbyterian Courts. At all events, the rigid distinction between Relevancy and Proof has seldom been perfectly observed in Heresy prosecutions ; and it certainly was not maintained in the discussion with which we are now concerned. How, indeed, could men who had been considering Ferguson's opinions for months ; who had just spent three whole days in debating the indictment against him ; who would probably have taken no interest in a mere abstract theological discussion : how could such men be induced to confine themselves to an academic argument as to the general correctness of certain propositions ? The

proceedings were continually interrupted in an irritating manner by the constant endeavour of the Moderator to enforce the logical doctrine of Relevancy, and to prevent speakers from mentioning the question with which they were mainly concerned: the question whether or no the tenets of the defender were heresies deserving of censure. Of course the attempt to restrict controversy in this way failed. It could not do otherwise, indeed, in view of the fact that the brethren brought with them written speeches from which it was impossible for them to depart at the call of the Chair. The *Glasgow Herald* remarked that what was needed for this case was not a reporter, but a man with a wheelbarrow to convey to the offices of newspapers the manuscripts of reverend disputants. And it was not to be expected that gentlemen who had consumed the midnight oil in the preparation of arguments for and against Fergus Ferguson would abandon their elaborate deliverances in order to embark on barren statements as to the merits of impersonal opinions. The whole case was really debated and decided on the question of Relevancy.

The second stage in trial by libel, namely Probation, is essential to the process, and is of importance in trials where the charges have to be brought home to the accused by the evidence of witnesses, as for instance in the Row Heresy Case; but it is of little moment in prosecutions which are founded on the acknowledged writings or speeches of the accused. Hence, in the

Kilmun Case, Robinson was deposed as soon as the libel against him had been declared relevant. Hence, also, the debate on Probation was an empty form in the judicial process with which we are now concerned. It was surely plain enough that opinions expressed in the quoted language of Ferguson were certainly Ferguson's opinions. Suppose that the poet Tennyson had been arraigned for teaching erroneous doctrine, and suppose that one of the charges had been stated thus :—" Whereas it is contrary to truth and an error to say

> That nothing walks with aimless feet,
> That not one life shall be destroyed
> Or cast as rubbish to the void
> When God hath made the pile complete,"

it would surely have been needless to argue at length as to whether or no the affirmations thus made were truly Alfred Tennyson's.

III.

The difficulties thus inherent in the structure of the libel, and the irregularities which had attended its preparation, were the root of confusion and friction and caused the trial to progress in a jerky and eccentric fashion, with occasional paroxysms of wrathful energy. On one occasion a member of the Court " gently pushed " a brother from the platform ; and this Cromwellian mode of dealing with a foe seems to have so amazed the Moderator that he sat speechless in the

chair. Controversies on points of order arose suddenly from time to time like squalls in a Highland loch; and discussion became so involved sometimes that even a Judge of the High Court might have been bewildered. Certainly the Moderator often was at his wits' end how to rule and whom to rebuke. "We know how to conduct our own business," he exclaimed once, in an attempt to assert the dignity of his office. "Indeed you do not," replied a voice from the gallery, with the truth that is often at the heart of impudence. Thus there occurred, now and then, scenes which were highly dramatic, when words had to be withdrawn, oratorical excesses rebuked, and apologies tendered.

It is not, however, to be supposed that the proceedings of the Court were, as a rule, unbecoming, or that the majority of its members failed to display a sense of their responsibility. Although it is true that party feeling became very strong as the Case went on, and that antagonisms were created which endured for many years, yet there prevailed, on the whole, as Ferguson himself admitted, a spirit of controversial fairness and a desire to see that justice was done. Such breaches of decorum as did occur were provoked generally by real grievances and by irregularities due to inexperience. Especially, it must be said that the leading figures on both sides proved themselves, except in one or two cases, worthy of the parts they were called to play in this painful drama.

Dr. James Black of Wellington Church, the chief

Prosecutor, was simply incapable of anything undignified or unkind or wilfully unjust. He was an impressive personality; tall of stature and of singularly grave and reticent mien; imperturbable and self-controlled. A weighty preacher, he was chiefly eminent for his pastoral gifts, which, indeed, amounted to genius. He was in charge of the great congregation whose minister is now the celebrated preacher, Dr. George Morrison; and he held the reverence and affection of his people, partly, no doubt, by his teaching, but mainly by his amazing, self-forgetting and unfailing care for them in all the concerns of this mortal life, as well as of that which is to come. A great shepherd of souls is always worthy to be held in peculiar honour, and such an one was James Black. In his theological opinions he was of the old school; dwelling within the strong gates of the Calvinistic system, nor ever being tempted to issue forth into the open country, or even to look out upon the vast spaces which lay beyond the walls. He is said to have taught the Confession of Faith to his Bible class! It must have been a very strong sense of obligation which led him to accept the office which he held during this trial, for he liked Ferguson, and he hated battle. In the event, indeed, he took no large part in the debates. A few weighty and well-considered speeches he did make, as was his duty; but, for the rest, he exercised with perseverance his characteristic gift of silence. And, of what he did say, nothing was unworthy of a man who concealed beneath

a somewhat stately and distant manner a very tender and brotherly heart.

The greater part of the duty which devolved upon the official prosecution was, however, discharged by the Rev. James Buchanan, who was chosen for this work because he possessed gifts which would have fitted him to excel in the legal sphere. He was not personally known to the present writer, who remembers him only as the very efficient and respected Foreign Mission Secretary of the United Presbyterian Church. But he was held in high regard by those who enjoyed his acquaintance; and one has heard Dr. D. W. Forrest and others express the utmost esteem for him on account, not only of his abilities, but also of the kindness and generosity of his temper. For such a man the task of conducting the case against Ferguson must have been distasteful and trying; indeed, he undertook the service with great reluctance, and found the burden of it so heavy that his strength for a time failed beneath the strain. It is to be remembered, also, that at the close of the trial he resisted with warmth a proposal that Mr. Ferguson should be publicly rebuked by the Moderator; and this revealed a spirit free of bitterness. Nevertheless, he fulfilled his office of Prosecutor with rigour and thoroughness, having several sharp encounters with the Defence. His speeches exhibited strong conservative conviction, as well as controversial acuteness and power of precise statement. He, in his argument, avoided metaphysic, and contented himself with a

clear, forensic exposure of the opposition which he believed to exist between the views of the defender and the doctrines of the Confession.

But the theological mainstay of the prosecution was undoubtedly Dr. David Young, a man of ability and notable logical power. Indeed, Ferguson himself recognised in him his most dangerous as well as his most tenacious antagonist, and he was credited with inspiring the policy of the orthodox party throughout the entire proceedings. This attitude of his is difficult to explain, for he was understood to be himself of liberal opinions. He appears, however, to have been an enemy of mysticism, and to have held a philosophy antagonistic to Ferguson's. And this consideration may possibly afford the key to his action, for philosophical differences go very deep. But however this may have been, he maintained all along the position that the Confession remained the standard of the Church's faith, and that it was, therefore, necessary to test every question by appeal to its teaching. He seldom referred to his own opinion, but only to the opinions of the Confession. The Creed taught one thing, Ferguson another; therefore Ferguson must be condemned. This position was logical enough, but it seemed unreal and formal to those who believed that Dr. Young himself was not completely in accord with the Calvinistic System. His contendings, therefore, aroused a degree of indignation and hostility among the party of the defence such as was not provoked by any other man in the Court.

The leader of the Ferguson party was Dr. Joseph Brown, the veteran Temperance Reformer, famous platform speaker, distinguished preacher, and very clever and good-humoured controversialist. Dr. Brown had always been liberal in his outlook, and had as we have seen advocated Creed Revision far back in the '40's. He did not accept Fergus Ferguson's position, and never disguised the fact that he defended the heretic mainly because he loved him. But he loved liberty as well, and had a rooted dislike of all prosecutions and condemnations. No doubt his failure to agree perfectly with the opinions of the accused was detrimental to his advocacy of the case; but the line of argument which he followed was acute and deserving of success. On every count his contention was the same: Granted that the opinion here declared to be erroneous is not the same as the Confessional doctrine; nevertheless, it is not so absolutely discordant with that doctrine or with general Christian belief as to be an intolerable heresy; therefore it ought not to be condemned. For instance, when dealing with the first charge, which concerned the Atonement, he said in effect: Mr. Ferguson believes in an Atonement and differs from others only in his speculative theory of it. With that theory we have nothing to do; it is Mr. Ferguson's affair. So long as he believes and teaches that all men are saved through the sacrifice of Christ he remains entirely orthodox, whatever may be his metaphysical theory as to the matter. For example, he added, I do not myself

believe in the Eternal Sonship of Christ; though I believe in the Incarnation. Yet you do not libel me on that account, as one who rejects the Divinity of our Lord. Why, then, should you condemn Mr. Ferguson, who believes in the Eternal Sonship but denies certain other things which I accept? There must be room in the Church for theoretic differences as to such high matters as Incarnation and Atonement, which none of us can profess to comprehend. It ought to suffice that we agree in affirming that Christ is Divine and that He is the only Redeemer of men. This was well and nobly said; and it was wonderfully liberal doctrine to be uttered by one who had begun his ministry in 1834. It really destroyed at a blow the elaborate unrealities of the libel. No one can read the speeches delivered by Dr. Brown, as given in the records of this Case, without admiration for this old man eloquent; for his fine temper, his chivalry, his loyal defence of a friend, his ripe, far-seeing tolerance of spirit. Loyalty and chivalry are ever beautiful.

The main supporter of Dr. Brown was the Rev. Robert Cameron. Mr. Cameron was a man whose quality was never fully recognised by his Church, with which, indeed, he was not in perfect sympathy, especially as to Disestablishment. He was a close theological student, a ripe and careful thinker, and a man of very wide culture, both literary and artistic. In his sermons, also, there were flashes of imagination and insight, very memorable to his hearers. He was not one of those

who strive or cry, neither was his voice heard in the street; he was alien in spirit to the restless, hurrying mood of a self-assertive age. But he exercised a ministry of wide and penetrating usefulness; and his genius lives on in his sons, one of whom is that unique artist, D. Y. Cameron, and another is Dr. J. Robertson Cameron of Aberdeen, one of the most eloquent of living Scottish preachers. Mr. Cameron, like Dr. Brown, was unable to accept Ferguson's system as a whole, but he pled his cause with unfailing ability and resource. The type of his defence was different from that of Dr. Brown, and characteristic of his learned and historical mind. His mode of argument was, in effect, this: The opinions imputed to the Defender may not be in harmony with the Confession; but they are in harmony with the general thought of the Christian Church. They have been severally held by this and that religious teacher of honoured name; and if we declare them intolerable we cut off our Communion from the line of catholic tradition; we make of it a mere sect that will not suffer a variety of opinion which has existed in every age and in all the great branches of the Church universal.

Among those who spoke ably in defence of toleration were Mr. Thomas Dobbie of Lansdowne, Mr. Scott Matheson of Claremont, Mr. Joseph Corbett of Camphill, Mr. Peter Wilson of Whiteinch, and Mr. (now Dr.) James Jeffrey of Pollokshields. The last-named had been a minister at Dalkeith when Ferguson was there.

He had steadfastly supported him throughout the Dalkeith Case; and with a like loyalty and sympathy he stood by him in every stage of this later Trial. These, with others, constituted the gallant band which resisted the prosecution to the end, fighting steadily on every count, doing their best in a hopeless battle. Their only disability, as disputants, was that they were, none of them, at one with the defender's positions and that they were unable to affirm that these positions were in harmony with the Confession of Faith. They were, therefore, compelled to plead, in general, for toleration, and to maintain, as was certainly true, that Mr. Ferguson's system of thought was both Christian and Evangelical, and therefore was no proper subject of condemnation or even of censure. This was a broad and rational ground of defence, but it was not an effective reply to the pedantic and external legalities of the libel, or to the methods of a Prosecution which persisted in confining itself to the contention that the opinions libelled were at discord with the Creed of the Church.

IV.

It is not desirable, or indeed possible, to analyse in detail the arguments used on one side and the other throughout this Trial; to do so would be to exhaust utterly the indulgence of the reader. It is necessary, however, to direct attention to certain salient features of the Discussion. In the first place, it is well to indicate

the objections to the relevancy of the Libel which were stated by the Defender. He began by denying the right of any body of Christian men to inflict on one with whom they chanced to disagree in opinion such censure as was demanded in the indictment. This preliminary protest was couched in terms so Fergusonian that the passage may be quoted here : Having remarked that the prosecuting party in the Presbytery, spite of their defeat on the question of Creed Revision, seemed to remain under "the mournful hallucination that they were the Church, and consequently entitled to deal with every person who differed from them," he went on to declare :

"I hold that it is the height of intolerance and spiritual tyranny to say that a man ought to be severely punished by any body of his fellow-men for his religious opinions, whatever they may be, and I hold it is persecution to go on to the infliction of such punishment. I do not require to be reminded that, if I am proved to be a heretic, I have no longer any right to be a minister of the Church. Or, if this Church cannot allow that liberty of thought in connection with the study of the Divine Word which I find it necessary to claim, she has only to say so, and we shall all know where we stand and how to act. There need be no great noise or heat about that. It is simply a question as to terms of service, which I am far more at liberty to decline than the Church is to impose. But even then there is no occasion for censure at all. Is a man to be formally censured by his fellow-men for having spiritual convictions of his own, and for uttering them in language as natural to him as other people's phraseology is to them ? Is a man to be sneered at, by Christian men,

and brethren in the ministry, for having, forsooth, a style of speech that is somewhat his own ? ”

After stating one or two other preliminary objections to the Presbyterial procedure, Ferguson went on to a formal criticism of the libel as a logical document. His chief contention was that, while the statements complained of were alleged to be errors, no attempt was made to show in what respect they were erroneous or to prove that they were really incompatible with the Church's Creed ; that they were utterly at variance with it and not merely extensions or modifications or developments of it. The indictment, therefore, failed in logical precision, being a syllogism without a middle term. Thus, to say that Christ died for all men was not the contradictory of saying that He died for some men ; to unite together the subjective and objective elements in Justification was not to exclude the objective element ; to affirm that in all law there is grace and in all grace law, was not to question that grace and law are distinguishable realities ; to assert that man in his natural and fallen state has a spirit as well as a soul and body is not the contrary of asserting that he does have a soul and body ; to teach that sin is antagonism to the very being of God is not the opposite of the doctrine that it is a violation of the Divine law. Thus, in respect of the charges stated in counts (1) to (5) of the indictment, Ferguson was formally successful in demonstrating that his doctrine was not proved to be a logical contradictory of the

Confessional doctrine. In each case, the statements differed from each other, only as a wider, deeper, and higher exhibition of truth differs from one which is narrower, less profound, and less lofty. Therefore, the libel, which was in its nature a logical document, failed of its purpose and was irrelevant.

As to the sixth count of the indictment which dealt with final Destiny, Ferguson objected that, in leaving out the charge which concerned the doctrine of God, the Presbytery had rendered it impossible that justice should be done to his teaching as to the final issue of things. For, our conclusion as to the ultimate fate of the Universe must depend on our conception of the Divine Being. It was his view of the character of God that led to his denial of the eternity of evil. The one followed from the other; and, inasmuch as the libel left this out of account, it failed of being just or relevant. He was at one with the Westminster Divines in so far as he shared with them a belief in the Deity; but the Confessional account of the Divine nature led to the conviction that evil was everlasting; whereas his own doctrine of God involved the conclusion that ultimately He would be all in all.

Ferguson next proceeded to a very acute analysis of the way in which each count was constructed. In every case there was set forth, first, a doctrine of the Church according to the prosecution; secondly, a number of Scriptural texts; and, thirdly, a statement in the language of the Confession. As to the

first of these elements in each charge, the Defender asked by whose authority this new Creed was set forth. Who gave the Presbytery the right to frame a dogmatic formula of their own? "Of all preposterous and intolerable things, the most so is to claim the power to manufacture spiritual laws to suit a particular end. I do not hold myself bound to square my beliefs with a creed made by this Court to suit the occasion." As to the quotations from Scripture he objected that they "wanted precision," as indeed they did; regarding the citations from the Confession, he remarked that the attempt at that time of day to prove any man a heretic by reference to the letter of the Westminster Creed was only a solemn make-believe. No one, not even, he supposed, the official Prosecutors, accepted everything in the Confession. Individual exceptions were taken to one part or another of its teaching, and these were in the aggregate so numerous and comprehensive as to embrace probably the whole book. Strange that men who all were themselves at discord with something or other in the Calvinistic symbol should deny to him the liberty of controverting parts of its doctrine which happened to be acceptable to themselves! This criticism was incontestably sound. It is doubtful whether any man in the Court could listen to it and say, "My withers are unwrung." Indeed, George Gilfillan asserted in a letter to the Press that many members of the Glasgow Presbytery were, to his knowledge, far more anti-Calvinistic than

Fergus Ferguson; the chief difference between him and them being that, while he spoke out, they held their peace.

In anticipation of the reply which the Prosecutors afterwards advanced, the reply, namely, that they were required by the law of the Church to quote the Confession in an indictment for heresy, the Defender pointed out that the rules of the Church had been already broken by the Court. He also attacked with vigour Dr. Young's position that he was being tried, not by the letter of the Creed but by the system of doctrine contained in it. No system of doctrine could be derived from the Confession which was in accord with the system implicit in the Scriptures; and the Scriptures were admittedly the only ultimate authority.

"I believe that the Biblical and Confessional systems of doctrine, in so far as one can make them out, are irreconcilably opposed to each other. The system in the Bible is nothing less than the intellectual equivalent of the universe. It is the spiritual counterpart of the whole system of nature, and is in perfect harmony with the whole idea of God, the whole nature of man, and the whole purpose of the world; but the system in the Confession is a little dark and morbid arrangement, narrow and exclusive, out of harmony with the general scheme of the universe, unworthy of God, unsuited to man, and for all practical purposes a dead letter in the living world, save as it is used as a fetter to thought, and an engine of spiritual oppression, in the way of crushing out the best life of the Church."

In this passage Ferguson's hostility to Calvinism dis-

played itself in all its former strength; and from this point of his speech onward he departed from the attitude of mere defence and began to attack; he broke away from formal criticism of the libel in its logical structure, and assailed the theological attitude of the Prosecution with a force and passion which evoked both resentment and applause. Reference had been made to the Doctrines of Grace. What were the doctrines of Grace? They were, in the speaker's opinion, these: "That God sincerely desires the salvation of every human being; that He made provision in Christ for the salvation of all; that He has promised the aid of His own Spirit to enable every one to accept Christ and so to be saved." Not one of these evangelic teachings was to be found in the Confession. There were, of course, certain statements in that document regarding the love and benevolence of God. "But these occasional sayings are like so many flowers thrown upon a grave to charm away its sadness, but having no living connection with the lifeless form which lies beneath the sod." The doctrine of unconditional Election, for instance, contradicted every one of the doctrines of Grace.

"The usual formula is, that while holding the doctrine of unconditional election, we do not hold it in such a sense as to preclude us from also holding its contradictory. Such expedients are, I think, unworthy of Christian men. It is simply a demoralisation of human speech, leading to deeper declension. We cannot consistently hold that God loves all men,

and yet has no purpose of salvation in relation to all. We cannot hold that man is as passive as a piece of clay, and at the same time morally responsible. We cannot hold that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, determining *that* it shall be, and *what* it shall be, and yet is in no sense the Author of evil. We cannot consistently hold that good and evil are both eternal. There are laws of the intellect that forbid these conjunctions, and unless we are to be false to all that is holiest in our own being, and despise the ground of certitude itself, we must object to them."

V.

Such was Ferguson's criticism. It was expressed in his best style, clear, forcible, weighty; and it contained passages and phrases which betrayed the man of genius, passion, and imaginative power, as distinguished from the mere logician. As we study this speech, and compare it with the others delivered during the controversy, we become convinced that the accused man, whether he was right or wrong in his several contentions, was the most impressive figure in the entire Drama.

Dr. Black's reply was clearly reasoned, careful, and dignified; but it does not lend itself to quotation. His line of argument was that already suggested; and was, indeed, the only line open to the Prosecution. The form of the Libel was according to precedent; no serious irregularity had attended the method of its preparation; the Defender was himself bound by his ordination vows

to recognise the Confession as embodying Scriptural doctrine, and it was the standard by which alone he could be tried; they were not there to test any man's orthodoxy by appeal to "an ideal Creed," but by the actual established Creed of the Church; and judged by that criterion Mr. Ferguson was undoubtedly and admittedly the teacher of unsound opinions. The Defender denied the forensic view of the Atonement; he rejected the doctrine of Election; he affirmed that "Justification was a state, not an act"; he averred that the appointed penalty of sin was, not spiritual and eternal death, but annihilation of personality; he asserted that the sacrifice of Christ was not completed on the Cross but was carried on in eternity; he taught the existence of an Intermediate State of "intellectual rectification" beyond death; and he explicitly repudiated belief in everlasting punishment. The charges against him were therefore justified, and the libel involving these charges was adequate and relevant.

This short outline of Dr. Black's argument shows that, while the prosecution adhered formally to the text of the Creed, they did not seek to convict the Defender by appeal to it only. They sought also to prove that his teaching was inconsistent with the Reformed system of doctrine exhibited in the Confession. It may therefore be argued that their case was justly and moderately conducted. We must add, however, that this estimate was not universally shared by those who witnessed the trial. The newspapers

contained many letters which expressed great indignation in view of the "personal rancour and relentless vigour" displayed by some prominent members of the conservative party. The *North British Daily Mail*, it is true, applauded the "fairness and even generosity" of the Presbytery; but the *Glasgow Herald* in a leading article commented on "the ardour with which the prosecution advances to the slaughter of heresy with that two-edged weapon, of which one edge is the Bible and the other is the Confession, and the rotary motion of which is less awful than ridiculous." But however this may be, the accusers of Ferguson were victorious all along the line; and the libel was found relevant in every single count of its comprehensive indictment. It was declared, in effect, to be an instrument well-constructed and complete in every part. That which it alleged to be orthodoxy was orthodox, and that which it affirmed to be heretical was heresy; and the proofs it adduced from Scripture and the Confession were fitted to make this plain.

VI.

The question of Relevancy having thus been decided, the Presbytery stepped briskly into the second stage of the Prosecution, which, according to Dr. Black, was concerned with the double question whether the opinions now pronounced to be heretical were actually taught by the accused, and whether they were fairly stated in the libel. The Defender was, therefore, asked, to begin

with, if he pled "guilty" or "not guilty" to the first count of the indictment which referred to the Atonement. To this query the Prosecutors demanded that he should give a simple, categorical answer. But this was plainly an unfair requirement. How could he plead not guilty to a charge stated in his own words? And how could he plead guilty without admitting that his opinions amounted to heresy? This difficulty was so obvious that, after much ado, he was allowed to affirm, "I maintain that I am in accord with the faith of the Church universal, and with whatever is special in the distinctive history of this Church." To this general plea he adhered on every count, though his language varied with the varying content of the several accusations. Thus, the reference to "the distinctive history of the Church" was apposite to the subject of Atonement; it was meant to indicate that Ferguson's teaching on the matter was in the line of the United Presbyterian testimony that the work of Christ had a universal aspect and that the Gospel was freely offered to every man. But on all the counts of the libel his defence was substantially this: "I am not guilty of departure from catholic Christian belief."

We have said that the whole case was really settled when the question of Relevancy was determined; and this statement is justified. It is true that an opposite conclusion may seem to be indicated by the fact that, on the issue of Probation, the accused was declared not guilty as to the fourth charge. But this charge related

to the Fergusonian doctrine that there were not two Covenants, but only one, and that Grace and Law were not opposing realities but only differing aspects of one fact. This was so inconsiderable an "error" that the Court could hardly have made it an occasion of censure without incurring the contempt of all intelligent men. Surely the Church would have been brought to a sorry pass had it refused to tolerate so very mild a speculation.[1] The *Scotsman* in a leading article asked "whether any member of the Glasgow Court believed that the eternal welfare of United Presbyterians would be endangered even if they adopted the whole creed of Mr. Ferguson? And, if they did not believe that, why all this libelling and fighting?" This was not an inappropriate question. And, certainly, the conviction that there was only one Covenant between God and His creatures, and that "all law was grace and all grace law" could work no conceivable mischief in the constitution of even the most fragile believer. We cannot, therefore, agree that the acquittal of Mr. Ferguson on this point contravenes the general conclusion that he was really condemned on the question of Relevancy.

Into the details of the discussion in this second stage of the Trial we need not enter. The old ground was trodden once more; and battles already decided were waged again. Excellent speeches were made, enormous

[1] It is to be noted, however, that the Synod reversed, on appeal, this Presbyterial decision, and actually found Ferguson *guilty* on the fourth count of the libel!

labour was expended, and fiery scenes were enacted. To the end that gallant veteran, Joseph Brown, fought with the spirit of Alan Breck; to the end Dr. Black was dignified, Mr. Buchanan acute, Dr. Young severe, Mr. Cameron historical and catholic, Mr. Dobbie cogent and calm; to the end, also, the Defender at the bar bore the burden and heat of the day, contesting every issue with courtesy yet with a keen blade, extenuating nothing, withdrawing nothing, unapologetic, unafraid. To the end, also, the heat and even bitterness of feeling which surrounded the Trial kept increasing, and temper on both sides alike became more and more dangerously inflamed. George Gilfillan wrote to the newspapers plainly declaring that if Fergus Ferguson were expelled he would not depart alone. The Press almost unanimously supported the accused; and in this it represented the majority of educated Glasgow laymen, who regarded the whole prosecution as vexatious and unjustified. The Queen's Park Congregation, as we have seen, was preparing for the worst eventualities by taking steps towards secession. Within the Presbytery itself it is not invidious to say that the majority of the ablest clergymen voted "not guilty" on every count of the Libel; and there were searchings of heart among the younger ministers everywhere. One of these, Dr. J. E. H. Thomson, now so well known as a learned Hebrew scholar, wrote a pamphlet on the side of the defence which had a decided influence. Altogether, the signs of approaching

disunion in the United Presbyterian Church grew more and more ominous as the days passed on, as Ferguson was convicted on charge after charge, and as he with his supporters registered successive protests and appeals to the Supreme Court. When at last he proceeded to the Synod, defeated by considerable majorities on every issue save one, and burdened with the weight, or with the glory, of a complicated condemnation, he was undoubtedly accompanied by the good wishes of a multitude and by the anxious thoughts of many who felt that their own title to retain a place in the Church of their fathers depended largely on the fate of his appeal.

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPEAL TO THE SYNOD.

I.

It may be conjectured that no man accused of heresy ever appeared at the bar of the Supreme Court in any great Presbyterian Church without the sense of undergoing a very severe ordeal. An Assembly, or Synod, endowed with an authority from which there is no appeal, is in its nature a formidable power. Moreover, there is something intangible in its atmosphere that is subtly daunting to the spirit of a solitary recusant. It is the representative of a long tradition; the voices of bygone Calvinistic generations seem to linger within its walls; and the very genius of the Confession inhabits it. The defender on trial, if he be possessed of imagination and the historical mind, can hardly fail to ask himself: Who am I that I should seek to question a venerable system, tested and tried by long experience, and held in reverence by my people throughout the ages of Protestant belief? Further, the whole aspect of the Court is undoubtedly impressive, for it combines a suggestion of pomp and circum-

stance with the intimidating power which belongs to a great assembled multitude. All about the bar, before, behind, and around it, the accused beholds the dense masses of his brethren, now become his judges; the public galleries also are crowded with people to whom he is an object of curious scrutiny. In front of him, elevated above the crowd, he beholds the Moderator, representative of the established order, clad in the traditional robes, clothed also in an authority which, if it be "brief," is not "little." Beside the Moderator are sundry of his predecessors in office who are understood to bear the lingering fragrance of a departed glory. A little lower than the Moderatorial Chair is the table where sit the gowned and hooded Clerks, learned in the lore of ecclesiastical precedents, in the laws of the Church, and in the rules of debate. In the near vicinity of these are gathered many Conveners of Committees, leading clergymen and important persons generally; seniors, and men esteemed to be pillars of the Church. Take it all in all, it is not to be denied that a supreme Presbyterian Council and Court of Appeal, met for the discharge of judicial functions, is entitled to its designation of "the Venerable," and is fitted to inspire a sentiment less serene, less pleasant, and more complex, than veneration in the mind of one arraigned before its justice.

Certain it is that the trial of his appeal must have been an experience in the last degree distasteful to Fergus Ferguson—sensitive, high-spirited, and in-

dependent. One may hazard the opinion that if he had followed his own personal inclinations he never would have taken his Case to the Supreme Court, but would have quietly withdrawn from the United Presbyterian ministry. The entreaties of his friends, the desire to avoid, if possible, the risk of causing further division or secession, and also the wish to fight his battle to the end, and to refuse no burden which his duty imposed—these were probably the influences which induced him to face the ordeal that confronted him when he took his place at the bar of the Synod. The Court met that year in the Free Assembly Hall; so that churchmen of the present day can easily present to their own minds the scene of Ferguson's final condemnation. He sat where Robertson Smith would have sat, had the General Assembly of the Free Church not met in Glasgow that year; for 1878 was an *annus mirabilis* which afforded to Scotland within the space of one month the spectacle of two great theological battles. Those among the audience who had never seen the accused before, and were prejudiced against him, must have been astonished by his appearance when he stepped to his place in the Hall. They had heard, perhaps, of a "heretical firebrand," a "troubler of the Western Church," a "libeller of the faith," a pestilent demagogue. But was this he? This seemingly youthful man, of prepossessing and cultivated bearing, so unassuming, so urbane, so evidently a quiet scholar and thinker, so aloof and meditative in his

aspect, so plainly remote in mind from the ways of self-assertive and violent men: could this be the John the Baptist they had come out for to see? Nor was the impression which he thus made when he entered the Court in the least modified during the later proceedings. For, to the end, he bore himself with quiet dignity and conciliating gentleness, betraying no resentment and no defiance. Except for the short time during which he addressed the House, he sat in a characteristic attitude, with folded arms and head slightly bowed. The only sign of feeling which he betrayed, apart from the emotion apparent in his final statement, was the sudden glance of keen and stern scrutiny which he directed towards any speaker who was guilty of a harsh or unfair attack. His attitude, as the *Scotsman* observed, was "faultless throughout," and his voice had never in it "a single false note."

II.

Dr. Woodside tells us that as soon as proceedings began it became apparent that there were three elements in the Synod: a liberal section determined to support Ferguson "at all costs"; a reactionary group who were resolved to stamp out heresy, whatever happened; and a mediating body of moderates whose policy was to save the Church from possible disruption or dispeace by saving the accused man from the fate of deposition which threatened him; though, at the same time,

they were not disposed to approve the contentions of the Defence.[1] This latter party owed the measure of success which attended its efforts to the able strategy of Dr. Calderwood, who was then at the height of his influence.

Dr. Henry Calderwood, Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh University, was a man of just, dispassionate, and penetrating judgment, a consummate platform speaker, and one in whom ecclesiastical instincts and tactical skill were combined with a kindliness and a lofty sense of honour which secured for him universal respect. The United Presbyterians never had a recognised "leader," such as Dr. Rainy was in the Free Church. But Calderwood, at the time of this Trial, might with truth have been described as the leader of the Synod, in the sense that he wielded a power in its debates which was not possessed by any other man. In his opinions he was substantially orthodox: though he held the theory that Conscience was the voice of God in the soul of Man, and therefore could neither be educated nor essentially corrupted; and this doctrine evidently involved something akin to Ferguson's view of the moral powers inherent in our fallen nature. Also, it may be argued that the intuitionalism of his philosophy was really inconsistent with some of the tenets of Calvinism. But apart from all this, Professor Calderwood, as Dr. Woodside says, "knew a man of spiritual mind when he saw him";

[1] *Life of Henry Calderwood, LL.D., F.R.S.E.*, p. 266.

and he was convinced of the heretic's essential loyalty to the faith. For this reason he was resolved from the first, as any reader of his speeches may discern, that Ferguson should if possible be retained in the ministry. This resolve was undoubtedly strengthened, as the Case proceeded, by the action and tone of the Defence, which plainly showed that a sentence of Deposition would involve a real menace to the unity of the Church.

This latter consideration probably occupied the first place in the mind of Dr. James Brown, whose services to the cause of liberty in this time of crisis were at least equal to those of Calderwood himself. Unlike the Professor, he was not remarkable for the orthodoxy of his views, being indeed a theological liberal in a sense that was alien to the mind of Ferguson. The latter was a systematic thinker who scorned the notion of a religion without dogma, whereas Dr. Brown was a humanist, a literary man, an ecclesiastic, and one whose beliefs eluded definition. He had, as we have seen, opposed the movement for Creed Revision, being disposed rather to bear the ills he had than fly to others that he knew not of. Hence he entertained small sympathy with Ferguson's reforming adventure, though he admired his personality and the gallantry of his attack. What determined him in his efforts to secure an acquittal in the Case was partly, no doubt, the obvious fact that he could not in honour do otherwise. But aside from this personal motive, he was guided by far-seeing considerations of policy. The end he kept

steadily in view was the final reunion of the Scottish Churches; and it was evident that to achieve this he must maintain intact the unity of his own denomination. During the illness which closed untimely a strenuous and useful life, he counselled Dr. A. R. MacEwen, in words which the latter repeated to the present writer: "You know that I have always loved our United Presbyterian Kirk, and have done my best to preserve and strengthen it. But you must now do your utmost to secure its speedy union with the other Churches; for its work as a separate organisation is done." This saying affords the clue to Dr. Brown's line of action in 1877 and 1878. He opposed Creed Revision, lest it should endanger future efforts to unite all Presbyterians in one; and he sought to secure Ferguson's acquittal, because he saw with quick intuition that an opposite verdict might cause a division in his own Communion. A liberal, magnanimous, and sagacious leader was lost to the Church when James Brown died.

III.

The proceedings of the Synod in the appeal of the Rev. Fergus Ferguson, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Brown, and sixteen other members of Glasgow Presbytery, against the decisions of that Court were in due time begun. Consideration of the matter was fitly preluded by prayer, which was offered by Dr. John Cairns. A spectator observes that only men of very obdurate

spirit could have listened unmoved to that grave and solemn supplication; and for a moment the peace which belongs to the eternal heart of religion seemed to descend upon the House. Perhaps some may be of opinion that the Court might well have separated in that mood of peace, declaring that the "heresies" alleged were of little moment, touching not at all the majesty of the everlasting Faith.

With such possibilities, however, sober history has small concern. What really happened was that the crowded hall became presently the arena of hot dispute as to formal points of order. For Dr. James Brown and others sought to have the Glasgow Presbytery convicted of various errors and irregularities in procedure, of which, indeed, they had certainly been guilty. Dr. Calderwood, however, supported the inferior Court; and after keen discussion he finally had his way. This formal vindication of the Glasgow authorities was, nevertheless, largely a matter of policy; for the Synod implicitly rebuked them by departing from their methods. It practically refused to try the Case by appeal to the letter of the Confession; and it resolved to regard the questions of Relevancy and Probation as two sides of one fact, dealing with them simultaneously. The men from the western city must have reflected ruefully upon the labours and the confusions and the making of speeches which they might have been spared had they followed so sensible a course.

When these preliminary troubles were over, and Dr.

Joseph Brown and others had been heard in support of the appeal on the first count,[1] Mr. Ferguson was asked to speak. He accordingly left his place and advanced to the rostrum, 'mid tumultuous cheering from the galleries: a demonstration which the "genial remonstrances" of the venerated Moderator, the Rev. David Croom, failed for a time to subdue. If, however, these applauding people expected from the speaker anything popular or sensational or even easily comprehendible, they must have been sorely disappointed. The speech was, indeed, a strange one to be made by a man on trial for his ecclesiastical existence, for it was a brief, calm, deliberate explanation of certain points in his doctrine of Atonement. The first count of the libel, to which he addressed himself, charged him with error, inasmuch as he maintained that Christ in His death satisfied the justice of God "as that which requires the surrender of the human will to the Divine." He accordingly "explained" to the Synod that this conception of Justice included, of course, the truth, which, indeed, he had stated to the Presbytery, that "Justice is the impartial administration of law, and the rendering to every man according to his deeds." For, these things were part of the Divine order, and were necessary to secure that harmony of all creatures with the mind of God which was the fulfilment of Justice. Christ, also, as the speaker had always taught, identified Himself with the race of man; and this implied His free sur-

[1] See Appendix: *Libel.*

render of Himself to the necessities of that position, which required among other things that "the law should impartially sweep over even the Son of God," as thus made one with the sinful. For the rest, he reiterated the teaching with which the reader is familiar as to the nature of the Saviour's sufferings in death, and as to the ultimate penalty of sin, and as to the eternal Priesthood of the Redeemer.

We shall deal at the end of this chapter with the charge that Ferguson in this and in subsequent "explanations" withdrew from his characteristic teaching, or, as the popular jargon has it, "climbed down" from the ground he had occupied during earlier discussions. It is enough, for the present, to say that, in this opening statement to the Synod, he expressed himself with less than his usual clearness and distinction. He displayed, of course, his wonted charm of manner and pleasing style of oratory. But his speech assumed that his hearers were intimately acquainted with his system as a whole; and it left so much unexpressed that it must have been unintelligible to the majority of his audience. The truth is that he was, at this moment, suffering from the exhaustion entailed by his long fight in the Glasgow Court, being indeed on the verge of that temporary collapse of his strength which took place before the Case was ended. Only by a supreme exertion of his iron will was he able to speak at all; and the entire tone of his remarks indicated a mood aloof and detached. It was the utterance of a wearied man, tired

of incessant debate and persistent misunderstanding and tedious repetition. Almost it suggested that he had anticipated and discounted final defeat, that for him the bitterness of ecclesiastical death was past. It seemed imbued with a spirit as of one who should say to himself :

> " Let the long contention cease !
> Geese are swans and swans are geese.
> Let them have it how they will !
> Thou art tired ; best be still ! "

IV.

After Mr. Ferguson had resumed his place, Dr. David Young replied for the Presbytery in the ablest of all the speeches delivered by him during this prosecution ; clear, inexorable, closely reasoned and impressive. But the most significant statement it contained was perhaps the declaration that Mr. Ferguson in the foregoing speech had said nothing really new : it would be found, " if the matter were probed," that the Fergusonian errors still remained. The contention that " Justice was that which required the submission of the human will to the Divine " involved the inference that a perfect confession and obedience would suffice to remove guilt. " But while this was the doctrine of John MacLeod Campbell, it was not the doctrine of this Church." This criticism was quite sound, except that no attempt was made to show that Campbell was wrong. It is

remarkable that no one except Dr. Young had enough theological discernment to see that Ferguson's teaching as to the Atonement was essentially in harmony with Campbell's. Yet so true is this as almost to justify the assertion that the great teacher who had, in his own person, been condemned in 1831 by the General Assembly of the National Church, on the ground of his earlier doctrine, was condemned again in the person of Fergus Ferguson, by the United Presbyterian Synod of 1878, on the ground of his later fully-developed theory. It need not be added that the decisions of these tribunals have availed nothing against the influence of a type of spiritual thought which has subtly transformed the whole attitude and tone of modern theology.

The course of the subsequent debate produced nothing really new in the way of light and leading. The two Browns, Joseph and James; Mr. Cameron, Mr. (now Dr.) William Morison, Mr. Dobbie, and other well-known men, fought for the accused with courage and resource, but even they could not be expected to add much fresh material to the immense accumulation of arguments which the Glasgow Presbytery had so laboriously created. The Defender, during the earlier proceedings, had likened his own system of thought to a pyramid; and when some one had tried to ridicule this figure of speech, he had retorted, "You do not overturn a pyramid by sneering at it." But, whether or no the Fergusonian system resembled one of the august structures of Egypt, the Presbyterial achieve-

ment in the way of polemical production did certainly rival the work of the Pharaohs, if not in symmetry at least in size. The Synod's occupation was in the main to compass this mountain of controversial theology; to explore, examine, and value it. It was a fatiguing business; and the occupants of the crowded galleries, being bored and almost stifled, may be excused for occasional disorder, which was once so marked as to evoke from a distinguished elder the exclamation: "Mr. Moderator, you will have to invoke the aid of the Civil Magistrate." [1] This palpable hit at the austere voluntaryism of the Synod was received with great laughter, and somewhat relieved the situation.

As the debate went on, however, the prospects of the Defence continually darkened. Evidently the majority of the Court were not satisfied that Mr. Ferguson was orthodox as to the Atonement. The greater number of the members were still Calvinists, and they, not unjustly, suspected that the accused was nothing of the sort. Mr. James Orr, who became later so famous as a theologian and professor, discerned this hostile drift of opinion and took action which afterwards bore valuable fruit. He was himself, at that time, substantially an adherent of Calvinism; but he was throughout his whole career the steadfast enemy of all intolerance. He therefore rose and put to the accused certain questions which were so framed as to insure a favourable reply. As Mr. Orr's intervention had a profound

[1] R. T. Middleton, M.P. for Glasgow.

influence upon the development of the Case, we may quote at this point from the report :

Mr. Orr, Hawick, wished to ascertain exactly what Mr. Ferguson's views were, in order that he might know how to proceed in the matter. He wished to know from Mr. Ferguson whether he regarded Christ's death as a satisfaction to God's justice, as that which required the punishment of sin.

Mr. Ferguson.—That is most assuredly my conviction.

Mr. Orr.—I wish to ask Mr. Ferguson again whether, in regard to this penalty of sin, he regards mere annihilation, viewed in itself, as the penalty of sin, or if his view is that this is the extreme form of the penalty of sin, the essence of the penalty lying in the withdrawal of God from the soul, spiritually first, and not ending till the being is annihilated—that it covers the whole range of the penalty of sin, the extreme penalty being the utter annihilation ?

Mr. Ferguson.—I don't think I have ever said anything to give that impression. I do not look upon the ultimate penalty of sin as the whole penalty, and I do not believe that it is. I believe there are other aspects of the penalty than that which may be called the ultimate penalty, the subjective consciousness of guilt, for instance. The sufferings of conscience may be spoken of as, I think, a form of penalty.

Mr. Orr.—Does Mr. Ferguson believe that Christ's death is the only ground on which, consistently with the honour of God and the claims of His law, He can remit and does remit the guilt and penalty of the sins of will and life to believers and to men generally, and that it is on that ground the sins of will and life are remitted ?

Mr. Ferguson.—I thought I had to some extent, if not altogether, answered that by saying that I believe

the death of Christ is the ground on which all sin is remitted.

Mr. Orr.—Actual as well as original ?

Mr. Ferguson.—All sin.

Now, this brief catechism was constructed by Mr. Orr with a generous intention, and it achieved its end in reassuring those who liked to hear the soothing sound of traditional phrases. But it will be observed that it was couched in language strangely wanting in precision. The first inquiry was so expressed that Mr. Ferguson could not have answered it otherwise than he did, except by an exposition of his entire system. As for the second query, it is quite unintelligible, and shows a curious misunderstanding of the issue. With reference to the third of Mr. Orr's interrogations, it will be noted that the accused ignored all the intricacies of it, and contented himself with a reply which was no more than a repetition of his answer to question one. The whole incident is an illustration of the truth that men who think in the forms of opposing philosophies can never really understand one another ; that it is vain to put questions stated in Calvinistic language to a man who is not a Calvinist ; that mere external cross-examination, directed to isolated points in a coherent scheme of spiritual thought, is impotent to secure the elucidation of truth. Nevertheless, this passage in the debate was important, for Dr. Calderwood made it the ground of the saving clause in his subsequent motion.

V.

In the course of further discussion some memorable things were said, and sufficient proof was afforded of the abundant ability which was to be found within the Court. It could not, indeed, have been otherwise, seeing that the debate evoked the best efforts of men like Calderwood, Cairns, Orr, Hutton, and many more already mentioned. Perhaps some members of the audience may have realised, as they listened, what a talented body of men the Scottish clergy at that time were. They may have reflected on the brilliance of the debating power which would have been manifest that day if all the Presbyterian Churches had been one; if besides those who were leaders of the Synod, there had been present Tulloch, Caird, Charteris, Flint, Story, Rainy, Robertson Smith, Begg, Dods, and Bruce. These are far-shining and venerable names. Has Scotland many of their peers to-day?

But apart from such stirring if somewhat wistful thoughts, discerning listeners doubtless found much to admire in the spirit displayed by some of the speakers in this debate. Many courageous and magnanimous as well as acute things were said. Thus Mr. Wardrop confessed directly: "Mr. Ferguson's theology is my own." Mr. William Morison, who later became so great a pulpit and personal power in Edinburgh, beloved especially of a generation of theological students who knew him as "Morison of Rosehall,"

went further than Mr. Wardrop, and declared that to confirm the decision of Glasgow Presbytery "would be to condemn our brother because he had failed to measure the length and breadth of the tremendous necessity which required the Redeemer's death." "Was it to be regarded henceforth, and had it been regarded in the past, as a heresy in this Church to say that the main element in Christ's sacrifice was the surrender of the human will to the Divine?" He himself "had always believed that, and had always preached it." These sayings were representative of this whole speech, which was throughout characteristic of one who has ever been of fearless mind, whose spirit has never brooked the bonds of dogma. Dr. Hutton, again, though one of Ferguson's opponents, said of him that "his whole bearing before this Court, and many things in his high and noble speculations, had a fine attraction for all elevated minds."

Now it may well be suggested that these, and many other, utterances which occurred in the debate ought to have weighed with the Synod. How could it depose a minister whose speculations were, in the opinion of a theological stalwart, like Dr. Hutton, "high and noble"? How could it condemn the man at the bar without proceeding to libel those who professed to share his sentiments? Nevertheless, the Court went on its way towards an adverse decision, spite of the weighty and reasoned pleadings of Mr. Orr and Mr. Wardrop, spite of the unfailing efforts of Dr. James

Brown, and spite of the ominous expostulations of many who were plainly destined to be the future leaders of the Church's thought and learning. There can be no doubt that the perseverance of the Synod in its support of the prosecuting party was due, in a measure, to the knowledge that men like Dr. John Ker, the illustrious preacher and writer, Dr. John Cairns so widely renowned, and Principal Harper, that veteran champion of the faith, were all opposed to the cause of the Defence. The extent and depth of that opposition was indicated in the speech by Dr. Cairns, delivered at a critical point in the discussion. The greater part of this speech was occupied with reading to the House a very long and austere letter from the absent Principal. But, having concluded this epistolary recitation, Dr. Cairns proceeded as follows :

" I would not adopt all the expressions in this letter, which I have felt it my duty to read, but the general strain of doctrine here set forth in regard to the relevancy of this count, I cannot but adopt. I will not go into the argument which has been stated, and shall confine myself almost entirely to this statement which I have read as expressing my own views of the relevancy ; for I think it is much better, in a case where necessarily professors of the Church like Principal Harper and myself may have a kind of influence—that I should not go into the question of probation. I shall reserve my right to vote on that question, but shall not go into it, and shall not express my mind as to the vote which I shall give. There are other brethren who have spoken to that ; and I feel I would hardly be doing justice to the position I enjoy in the Church, or doing justice to

Mr. Ferguson—or it might be supposed that I would hardly be doing justice to him—if I went into the question of probation. I shall only say therefore before I sit down how much I feel relieved by some of Mr. Ferguson's answers last night, although I could only wish there was more clear harmony between these answers and the things I have read in the writings connected with the libel, which I have read carefully. I would most earnestly implore him, as I would implore every minister of the Church, and take the lesson home to myself, to consider whether we are doing full justice to this great doctrine of the Atonement, when we connect it with such speculations as that the ultimate penalty of sin is the annihilation of the creature, when we go into such speculations as to the holiness of the Spirit, the blessed third person of the Trinity, or the Divine Being, being really the *nexus* or connecting link between the soul and the body; when we connect views like these which are so startling, first to understand, and then to receive—when we connect these with things most surely believed among us. Oh, that we could all of us escape—I think that it is our bounden duty to try and escape—in as far as the grand central essence of our teaching in connection with the Atonement is concerned—out of this region of speculation, and get more near and close to the language of Holy Scripture itself, so that we may be in harmony with the song of the Church on earth and of the Redeemed in heaven: "Thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and our Father." May I express the hope, that whatever the issue of this trial may be, if our dear brother is at present under something of an eclipse, and if, as I fear I must come to the conclusion, in his teaching, so far as it is reflected in this document, there has been something like the gospel under an eclipse, that eclipse may pass away, and the full light break forth, and he and

we rejoice in the return of the glorious light and blessed liberty of the truth and of the kingdom of God."

John Cairns, at the time of this trial, enjoyed an enormous prestige and influence throughout Scotland; and this pronouncement of his was characteristic, in its blend of personal benignity with theological rigour. But his suggestion that "the gospel was under an eclipse" in the teaching of Mr. Ferguson was extremely severe, and aroused some resentment. It is certain, at least, that his entire attitude went a long way towards effecting "an eclipse" of whatever hope may have remained to the Defence.

VI.

When the debate was at last brought to an issue, three motions were before the House. One of these, proposed by Mr. Gloag and seconded by Mr. Macrae, was, in effect, that the appeals be sustained and the decisions of Glasgow Presbytery reversed. Another, moved by Mr. Wardrop and seconded by Dr. James Brown, bore that, while Mr. Ferguson had used language of a misleading kind, he was yet in essential harmony with the faith of the Church as to the Atonement, and that, therefore, the Synod reverses the judgment of the Presbytery. A third motion, proposed by Professor Calderwood and seconded by Professor Johnstone, was in the following terms: "The Synod sustains the decisions of Glasgow Presbytery on the evidence;

but in view of the explanations given by Mr. Ferguson to-night, it is desirable to defer judgment on this count till the other counts of the libel have been considered."

These three motions were put to the vote amid much excitement; and the result was as follows:

For Mr. Gloag's motion, acquitting Ferguson	4
For Mr. Wardrop's motion, acquitting Ferguson but criticising his language	118
For Professor Calderwood's motion, condemning Ferguson, but reserving judgment	330

For a verdict of condemnation there was thus a majority of 208. On parties being called to the bar, Dr. Young signified, on behalf of Glasgow Presbytery, his assent to the finding; while the appellants, represented by Dr. Joseph Brown, Mr. Pirret, and Mr. Corbett, dissented. Thus the Defender, after all his strivings and contendings and explainings, found himself convicted by his Church of holding heretical opinions as to the essential doctrine of Atonement; and the only logical issue of that decision was dismissal from the ministry. It is true that the pronouncement of judgment was deferred; but this, so far from improving his position, rather made it worse, inasmuch as it opened before him a prospect of prolonged conflict in which his fortunes seemed certain to fare even as they had fared in the battle just ended. This experience he had no mind to encounter; and therefore he took an unexpected step which produced consternation in the ranks alike

of friends and foes. Rising in his place, and speaking in quiet, clearly audible tones, though plainly under strong emotion, he thus addressed the Moderator :

" I have listened to the announcement you, Moderator, have just made with the deepest interest and emotion. I regret very sincerely that the Synod has seen it to be its duty to come to this decision. I regret also that the opinions which I have expressed in connection with this matter—in connection with the attempt I made in my own way to do what I thought a real service to the Church by seeking some rectification of our Subordinate Standards—have given rise to the misunderstandings that have emerged. And in so far as the methods in accordance with which I have endeavoured to advocate the case have been defective, and in so far also as some of the expressions connected with my advocacy may have appeared perhaps extreme, too strong, or ambiguous : for all that I have come to express regret. I do not know to what extent the method I have adopted is really open to such accusations, but that it has given occasion for difficulties and anxieties is, of course, to me a matter of sincere sorrow. At the same time, I trust you will give me credit for honesty of motive, and straightforwardness of intention, in seeking to do what I certainly believed to be in the true interests of the Church in which I have been nurtured. I endeavoured to do that, on what I considered at the time—what I still consider, and what I believe I shall continue to consider—to be the highest, the strongest, and the most honourable basis upon which any man could act ; the basis, that is, of a conviction that in so far as I know my own mind and my own opinions and tendencies in theology, I am in fundamental and immovable harmony with the Church of Christ. Notwithstanding this, the Synod has seen it to be its duty, earnestly desiring, I believe, to conserve

and promote truth, earnestly desiring to do what is right and just before God, and in view of the interests of the Church : the Synod has seen it to be its duty in these circumstances to come to this decision. And it is, therefore, with the deepest sorrow that I have now to intimate that, in view of such a verdict, it is quite impossible for me to take another step in carrying on the case. I feel that the judgment which the Synod has given upon this subject precludes, and puts an entire arrest upon, my moving further in the matter."

This utterance will be recognised as a model of restraint and of dignity. We cannot consider without admiration the strength and beauty of spirit which enabled a man to suffer all that Fergus Ferguson had suffered, to labour as he had laboured, to fail as he had failed, and yet to utter no unbecoming, defiant, or resentful word, or to depart either in tone or bearing from the requirements of honour and of self-respect. His statement was heard by a hushed house, and when it ended there was for a moment a silence, which was broken by nothing beyond the low murmur of the sympathetic crowd. As the full meaning of his action, however, began to be comprehended, and it was seen that his speech involved an intention to withdraw, not only from the Case, but from the Church, there was a great demonstration of feeling. His friends and supporters crowded round the bar proffering sympathy and encouragement and entreaties ; even some of his foes came to shake him by the hand ; while Ferguson himself sat with labouring breast and eyes bedimmed. Far harder to bear, for a man like him, is kindness than

hardness, sympathy than rebuke, affection than enmity. The self-control, that had never failed through all the long hours of strife, came near to failing him now when, in the hour of defeat, the strong attachment of so many comrades found its full expression, and wrapped him about with its warmth and cheer.

The emotional stress of this scene, however, was quickly merged in a demonstration that was ecclesiastically ominous. For practically the entire number of those who had supported the unsuccessful motions proceeded to the Table of the Court to register their dissents. This was a most unusual, indeed an unprecedented, development, and indicated a perilous intensity of feeling. The dissenting minority included, too, most of the young scholars and thinkers of the Church, who plainly felt that a stand must be made in the interests, not only of truth, but of mere toleration. What precisely this mood of theirs might forebode, no one could say. But many observers believed that the atmosphere of the House was such as heralds disruption. The Synod, indeed, went on to consider the remaining counts in the libel and to sustain the decisions of the Presbytery on every point; but this was a mere formality, for the Ferguson party had withdrawn from the Defence. Even the most fiery spirits among the victorious host found little zest in attacking a foe who never fired a shot; and the Court, as a whole, was distracted, and preoccupied with anxious thoughts. When the Synod adjourned there was much concern

in the minds of all who were lovers of unity and concord. And when it met again in the evening there was prevalent a mood of uncertainty, doubt, and fear. Many conflicting rumours passed from group to group of anxious men. Some said that Ferguson had sent in his resignation; others, nearer the truth, asserted that he had meant to take this action, but had consented to delay it at urgent entreaties from many quarters. It was reported, on the other hand, that a sentence of deposition would be forthwith demanded. Yet another suggestion was that Dr. Calderwood wished to secure the retention of the heretic, but that he was opposed in this, even by men like Dr. John Ker. But no one of the ordinary members of the Court really knew what private negotiations had been going on during the adjournment, or had any definite notion as to what might happen next. The veil which thus obscured events behind the scenes was as impenetrable as that which conceals the stage of a theatre when the curtain is down. Nor has this curtain ever been fully lifted. We know, of course, what happened later in open Court; and we conjecture that the hour in which members were supposed to be dining was, for some of them, a time of feverish activity. We see, as it were, shadows on the screen which resemble the hurrying figures of Dr. James Brown and other beneficent conspirators. We know also that Ferguson, in his rooms, was the recipient of many kind messages and earnest representations. But the rest is lost to sight.

And so we say, again, that the greater part of history never can be written.

VII.

We have seen that Dr. Calderwood had included in his motion a clause deferring judgment on the first count of the indictment till the whole libel had been discussed. And there can be little doubt that he did this in the hope of finally saving Ferguson from expulsion and the Church from trouble. He expected that the debate on all the charges against the accused would proceed for several days; and that, in the meantime, consultation might take place which should ease the situation. Perhaps also he reckoned on the cooling of ardour which is the fruit of controversial fatigue. But if this conjecture as to his motives be a sound one, it is evident that his strategy had been ruined utterly by the action of the Defence in withdrawing from the fight. For the result of that withdrawal was that the process of reviewing every count of the libel, instead of lasting for days, was ended in an hour. Dr. Calderwood was thus confronted forthwith by the fact that the conditions laid down in his motion had been fulfilled, that Ferguson was now in the position of a man found guilty of all the heresies with which he had been charged. It was, therefore, necessary to decide *instanter* what sentence should be pronounced.

When, accordingly, proceedings were resumed all

eyes were naturally directed towards Calderwood; but he sat impassive, and made no sign. There ensued, therefore, an extremely awkward period of silence wherein every man looked upon his neighbour with the mute inquiry: "Is nobody going to do anything?" At last, Dr. Marshall, the exponent of extreme Calvinism, arose and, to the surprise of all, moved that further action in the Case be postponed, and that a small committee be appointed to confer with Mr. Ferguson, to consider such explanations as he might be disposed to make, and to report within a few days. This was an astonishing step to be taken by the leader of the conservatives; and even more astonishing was the fact that he was seconded by Dr. James Brown. The co-operation of these two uncongenial spirits did certainly suggest motives of policy; to many it seemed as suspicious and astounding a portent as would have been an alliance between Beaconsfield and Gladstone. This joint action on the part of a Calvinistic precisian and a latitudinarian was well fitted to conciliate all parties; and it was surmised that the ostensible harmony between them was prearranged, that indeed the public performance of the mover in the matter was not wholly unconnected with the private entreaties of his seconder. There was nothing discreditable in such a suggestion; for these two men, if they were at variance as to many things, were at one in a common love of their Church, and in a common desire to secure her from danger and to preserve her in strength and unity. If, therefore,

they really did consult together and did co-operate in preparing a motion which gave some hope of a peaceful issue from a position of many perils, and even if Calderwood and others had benevolent foreknowledge of their scheme, who shall say that there was anything in the whole matter that was not to the praise and credit of all concerned? Democratic government, whether in Church or State, would be impossible but for the preconcerted guidance of sagacious and gifted men.

Ferguson himself was not present when this motion was made and passed, for he was suffering from extreme exhaustion. But there can be no doubt that he had been approached beforehand as to the proposal, and had been induced, for the sake of the Church, to promise acceptance of a position which he had so often already occupied with ever-deepening dislike; the position of being subject to the dealings of a Committee of "persuasion."

When the report of this Commission was in due course submitted to the Synod it appeared that the work of conferring with Mr. Ferguson had been entrusted mainly to a sub-committee consisting of Dr. Calderwood, Dr. Kennedy, and Mr. Wardrop. It further transpired that, after the first conference, Mr. Ferguson had become so prostrate that, on the certificate of two eminent physicians, he was pronounced entirely unfit to take part in any protracted discussions; and that subsequently the sub-committee had met with

him in his own rooms. The report proceeded to state that Mr. Ferguson had explained his position as to every count of the libel; that his statements regarding the doctrine of Atonement had been regarded as generally satisfactory; but that in respect of the other points involved, the Committee had been divided in opinion as to the adequacy of his "explanations." This report has been carefully studied by the present writer; and it seems plain to him that Ferguson, in his recorded sayings, conceded and altered nothing that he had taught as to Justification, the Covenants, the condition of fallen humanity, the ground of condemnation, or eschatology. It appears, therefore, that his whole system remained substantially what it has been stated to be in an earlier chapter of this book. The only matter regarding which there is even the semblance of modification is the doctrine of Atonement. In the discussion of this theme he is reported to have agreed that "Christ satisfied Divine Justice by enduring the holy indignation of God against sin." Now, this is certainly not Fergusonian phraseology; it does not occur in his writings, nor would it ever have suggested itself to his mind as the most accurate and adequate language to employ. It is much more characteristic of Dr. Calderwood than of himself. The probability is that it was put before him as terminology which he could honourably adopt; which would be satisfactory to the House, while, at the same time, it was consistent with his own contentions. Of course, he had always

taught that Christ identified Himself with the suffering and doom of a sinful race ; and these sufferings and that doom might be said to be the result of God's " holy indignation." So that we can find in this so-called concession no more than the acceptance, for the sake of peace and concord, of a form of words which was not his. If he had actually made more real and substantial surrenders we could hardly have been surprised in view of his state of health at the time ; the state, mental and physical, of a man " worn out with many wars." The fact that he emerged from all the theological intricacies that appeared in the Report with his doctrinal system, as a whole, intact must be counted, in the circumstances, a notable triumph.

VIII.

In any case, the Committee's deliverance, when it was presented by the Convener, Dr. Marshall, failed to give perfect satisfaction. In truth it was so bare, and so condensed in style, that it could hardly be followed intelligently by any audience who heard it read but once. And the natural result was that there were demands for more information than the Convener was inclined, or able, to give. His reply, as a rule, to all definite questions was that " he could not remember." Indeed, Dr. Marshall's persistent distrust of his own memory evoked first wonder and then laughter. " Was the question of substitution gone into ? " Dr.

Marshall did not remember. "Had Mr. Ferguson used the words, 'Christ met the liabilities of men'?" Dr. Marshall said that "their brother might have used these words but he did not remember them." Once more, it was asked whether Mr. Ferguson had said that Christ's righteousness was imputed to us? But still Dr. Marshall "did not remember." Finally, it was explained that no notes of the conversations had been kept, and that it was therefore unfair to ask the Convener for information as to particular expressions used therein. And so the unprofitable catechism came to an end.

As the hours went on, however, it became more and more evident that while many were willing to accept the Committee's general certificate of Ferguson's orthodoxy, a powerful party in the House remained deeply hostile and unconvinced. When, therefore, the Synod resolved to adjourn further discussion till the following day, it still seemed doubtful whether there would not be revealed a dangerous cleft of opinion between the determined conservatives and the now greatly augmented party of toleration. Dr. James Brown, with his acute ecclesiastical sense, discerned the full hazards of the position; and became convinced that there was only one man who could save the Church—Professor Calderwood. Now Calderwood, unfortunately, was engaged to go off to London next morning to interview Mr. Gladstone on an important point of public policy. But the result of much consultation and of a

night's reflection was that Dr. Brown decided that the Professor must be urged to surrender his intention and remain to guide the Synod. Accordingly he hastened to Calderwood's house, with eager steps, in the early morning. He was no more than in time ; for he found a carriage at the door, ready to convey to the station the man upon whom all his hopes were fixed. There followed then some sentences of impassioned entreaty from Dr. Brown ; a few clear, crisp questions from the Professor ; then the instant decision which was characteristic of that philosopher : Calderwood would stay. The carriage was therefore dismissed, and these two chieftains, and devoted servants, of their Church went their way to the distracted Synod.

When the time for action came, Dr. Calderwood delivered a speech which was universally regarded as one of his greatest efforts. Without a note in his hand, but with consummate mastery of his material, he went from point to point of the libel and of the report, discussing them as a judge might have done in charging a jury. As was always the case in his public discourse, he was clear, cool, dispassionate ; his incisive tones fell vividly on every ear ; his exposition was skilful and convincing ; and if he was occasionally vague in his language, that was only when complete lucidity was either not to be attained or not to be expected. The resolution which he submitted to the Court was a long one and need not be given in full ; but its general purport was to express satisfaction with the Com-

mittee's findings; to regret Mr. Ferguson's speculations, especially as to the ultimate penalty of sin and the "modes of Judgment" in the future state; to decree that he be forthwith restored to the discharge of his ministerial functions; but, at the same time, to tender him "affectionate and solemn admonition." In supporting this motion Dr. Calderwood made no claim that the "heretic" had withdrawn his heresies, nor did he conceal his profound disagreement with him, but he declared his belief that Mr. Ferguson was essentially orthodox as to the Atonement, and that his unpleasing opinions on some subjects were not held in such a form as to be a peril to the faith.

As the speech proceeded, it became evident that the orator was securing the support of a House which was extremely anxious for guidance in the paths of peace. When he resumed his seat, after a really great performance, he was acclaimed with much cheering, mingled with cries of "Agreed, agreed"; and he was justified in believing that he had saved the Church from danger and Ferguson from penalty. In this happy conviction he immediately left the Court, to depart by the night train for London, where he was to address an audience more formidable than the Synod, in the person of the elusive Mr. Gladstone.

Well indeed was it for all concerned that Calderwood had remained in Edinburgh that day; for the sequel showed that Dr. James Brown had not erred in his intuition, and that but for the intervention of the

Professor, the cause of the Defence might have been lost after all. For the motion of the leader was not accepted without opposition; and it soon appeared that there still remained a considerable party adverse to Mr. Ferguson. Dr. Marshall proposed, as an amendment to Calderwood's motion, that a committee should be appointed to confer with Mr. Ferguson, with powers to issue the Case, as soon as it should find it convenient to do so. The House, we are told, "visibly shuddered," as well it might, at the prospect thus opened before it of further strife, of division and labour, ending in a new battle a year hence. It was quite well known, also, that even if the Church had been willing to face this further trial, Ferguson would have declined it with decision. Nevertheless, Dr. Marshall's motion was seconded by no less a person than Dr. Andrew Thomson, who declared that the views of the Defender, especially as to the doctrine of final Destiny, were unendurable, and that he himself could not remain in a Communion that tolerated them. The Court was by this time, however, at the end of its patience, and would listen to no more arguments. It even refused permission to Dr. Marshall to alter the terms of his motion in order, as he said, to meet the wishes of Dr. John Ker. There were constant cries of "Vote, vote"; all efforts to speak in support or presentation of motions were wrathfully put down; and there were scenes of great disorder and indignation. The Press next day commented very severely upon this conduct on the part of the

Synod, and no doubt it was undignified and even a little unjust. But members of ecclesiastical Courts are, after all, only flesh and blood, and this particular Court had been subjected to unparalleled stress and strain. It had been required to debate at great length, not only the Ferguson Case, but the whole subject of the Declaratory Act. It had traversed the entire field of religious controversy by two separate roads; it had climbed with toil the heights of the metaphysical Olympus by two distinct routes. It was surfeited with theology; and its temper was marked by the impatience that is born of fatigue, and the want of controversial appetite that comes of excessive nourishment. Why should it listen any more to speakers in whom it knew there was no especial wisdom? Why should it hearken to tales already, not twice or thrice, but ten times and more retold? It had formed its decision; why, then, should it not record the same forthwith? Besides, it had begun to suspect that all the toil in the Ferguson Case had been useless, and even a little absurd, inasmuch as the end was likely to be even as the beginning. This was the mood of the Synod; and it would not be gainsaid. Notwithstanding, we repeat that the vote showed how acute the danger had been, for Calderwood's motion was carried by no more than a majority of fifty. Nevertheless, the result was hailed with the utmost enthusiasm, with round after round of applause. In the galleries also there was waving of handkerchiefs and a loud acclamation which, we are told, resembled the

cheering that is heard when a popular favourite is elected to Parliament. And if, to all this, exception be taken, we may cheerfully respond :

> "How sad and bad and mad it was—
> But then, how it was sweet!"

Thus ended a great prosecution; and we may say of its final issue that "it was a famous victory." It was not a coherent result; but it was none the less beneficent. Many differing elements had gone to bring it about; fear as well as hope, policy as well as principle, error as well as truth. Also, it had left in a strange plight the chief figure in the Case. He was restored to his people and to his work, a man condemned for heresy as to nearly every cardinal doctrine, yet suffered to go unscathed except for an "affectionate admonition"; neither deposed nor suspended nor formally rebuked. Was ever man in such a fashion tried? Was ever man in such a fashion saved? Yet, nevertheless, his position when the Synod closed was, if anomalous, yet honourable; if illogical, yet victorious. He had secured in a measure every one of the ends for which he had fought: increase of liberty, a loosening of ancient bonds, an opening of the doors of an olden prison-house, a step towards a wider comprehension. Incidentally, he had said things in public and without compromise which had hitherto been whispered with bated breath. He had won the actual, if tacit, recognition of opinions which had been heretofore proscribed.

He had administered to his Church a salutary shock, and to conventional forms of thought a disintegrating thrill. He had attained the substance of triumph under the guise of defeat, and the reality of acquittal in the form of condemnation. He had carried his flag unlowered to the end. In fine, he had achieved the explicit toleration of anti-Calvinistic beliefs within the walls of a Calvinistic Communion.

. . . . . .

There remains to be considered the assertion that Fergus Ferguson, in fact, secured his safety by a recantation of his opinions. This was a charge commonly made at the close of the Trial, partly by those who were honestly bewildered, partly by embittered opponents, and partly, it is to be feared, by some who were disappointed that "a great Church had not committed suicide." All these people ignored, surely, the circumstance that, on no point except the Atonement, could it be even suggested that this man had ever withdrawn anything: that his doctrine of God, of Justification, of Human Nature, of Sin, of Final Destiny, and also his denial of the eternity of evil, remained, to the last, unshaken. As to his theory of Redemption, we must bear in mind Ferguson's oft-repeated pleading that, in his view of Christ's atoning work, he was in fundamental harmony with the catholic Creed of Christendom as it had been professed and held in every generation. Now, what is the essential feature of the universal Faith on this most sacred theme? Surely, it must

be admitted, on historical grounds, to be that our Lord accomplished something of an objective character, on our behalf, in virtue of which He is rightly called the Saviour of the World. Individuals may, of course, profess a purely moral-influence belief as to the Atonement, and yet be Christians of a very noble type, but they can hardly claim to be in harmony with the secular witness of the Church universal. This witness is that the sacrifice of the Redeemer has effected a deliverance and secured a hope on which we can lay hold, as a thing of strength, that is independent of our fluctuating faith and the rising and falling tides of our emotion. To this fundamental belief Ferguson held with no uncertain grasp. The purpose of all his strivings was to free this faith from everything that made it difficult, that obscured its glory, or that rendered it incredible to the minds of modern men. To this end, he attacked the Calvinistic presentation of it, which affirmed that the normal fate of fallen men was everlasting torment; that God had intervened of His good pleasure to deliver from this doom a certain fixed number of our race; and that He had accomplished this end by causing Christ to bear a penalty, or pay a price in suffering, that was equal to the punishment to which the elect were liable, or to the debt that they had incurred. In place of this he proposed the doctrine that man, in spite of the Fall, was still a spiritual creature and a child of God; that sin, however, was a perversion of the will, which led men to seek their own satisfaction

and to follow the law of their own self-seeking, rather than the law of self-surrender for the good of others, which was the ordinance of all life, even of the Divine life itself; that the logical penalty of this guilty perversion was the dissolution of the whole universe and of the human creature, inasmuch as it was the negation of the order on which the universe was founded and of the end for which man was brought into existence. This latter affirmation did not mean that the spirit of man could be destroyed, for that spirit was one with the life of God and therefore indestructible; but it did mean that the spirit could be taken away from man by the withholding of the Divine support, and this deprivation would involve the dissolution of human personality. That such a doom might not actually be incurred God interposed His saving grace, and finally in Christ took upon Himself the burden of mankind. On the Cross the Divine Son, identifying Himself with humanity, suffered that withholding of the Father's supporting power which was the appointed result of discordance with His law; and thus He secured salvation from this ultimate disaster for all mankind. This was the *expiation* wrought by the Saviour. But His *propitiatory* work, which is the ground of all actual forgiveness, as apart from the remission of final penalty, is His immortal priesthood in eternity, wherein He presents to God a humanity perfect in all things: in obedience even unto death; in brotherhood towards men; in filial love towards the Father; and in the

fulfilling of that Divine Justice which is the principle of harmony in the life of God and therefore demands a corresponding harmony among all creatures with themselves, with each other, and with Him.

This is the doctrine which Ferguson maintained in the speech delivered when he pleaded "not guilty" before the Presbytery. It is stated here, even at the cost of some repetition, because it serves to show that he did not alter his position or lower his colours when he agreed to accept the formula that "the Saviour satisfied the justice of God as that which requires the punishment of sin," and that He experienced the results of "God's holy indignation" against evil. The most careless reader of his works, the most unlearned hearer of his speeches, ought to have seen that such an acknowledgment was consistent with his teaching from the first. How could he have taught, as he did, that the Redeemer satisfied the requirements of God, without implying that He satisfied *all* these requirements? How could he have suggested that justice demanded harmony with law, and yet have denied that it demanded punishment for the breach of that law? If he always affirmed, as he certainly did affirm, that the ultimate fate of a sinful universe was the withdrawal of God's supporting presence, and that Christ suffered the sense of that withdrawal, how could he yet have refused to admit that the Saviour was involved in the penalty of transgression? This admission would have been freely made by MacLeod Campbell himself,

and it presented no difficulty to this later heretic, who was his successor in doctrine even as he was in the trials of Prosecution. The thing that Ferguson never did accept, but on the contrary persistently denied, was that the endurance of penalty was the main element in the Atonement, or that the demand for punishment was the chief part of Divine Justice. What he did repudiate to the last was the notion that the work of the Saviour was done for the sake of any chosen number of men, or that it was a "transaction" or "a bargain," in virtue of which God forgave so much debt in exchange for so much suffering, or that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us apart from our actual sharing in His obedience, or that the sacrifice of the Cross could be separated from the whole of our Lord's ministry on earth and from His perpetual Priesthood within the veil, or that sin and suffering could remain everlasting facts in a Universe which had been redeemed by the Son of God. These things he did deny, as Campbell had done before him, and to say that he withdrew from these negations, or capitulated to Calvinism under fear of deposition, is injustice inexcusable. Certain forms of expression he did accept for the peace of the Church that he loved; and who shall say that in this he was to blame? It is one thing to be willing, as he had proved he was willing, to go out into the wilderness alone; it is quite another thing to endanger the interests of a great Communion for the sake of words and names. Such

"concession" as he did make was wholly befitting a noble mind. To suggest that he yielded more than this were a sad affront to the memory of one than whom a more steadfast spirit never sought to serve the truth, or to minister to men in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AFTERMATH.

"AFTERMATH," according to its derivation, signifies "the second mowing"; the reaping of the later and smaller crop of the season's growth on old pasture-lands. But it has come to have many general and poetic uses. The late roses of autumn that appear in our gardens long after the glories of the summer bloom are withered and dead; the many-hued yet tempered and fading colouring of the sky when the splendours of sunset have yielded to the gloaming; the lesser troubles that walk in the footsteps of great disaster; the chastened joys or the milder sorrows that are the posterity of potent rapture or of giant grief: all these and many other kindred things are figured in that fine old English word, the Aftermath. And so the expression may be used with perfect fitness to describe the varied consequences, the personal and ecclesiastical incidents and experiences, which followed the decision of the Synod in 1878. It was not possible that a state of prolonged and keenly contested theological and religious strife should resolve itself, all at once, in a state of perfect peace, or pass away like the "un-

substantial pageant" of the *Tempest* and "leave not a rack behind."

I.

No sooner had the Synod formulated the judgment which closed the Ferguson Case than it directed Dr. James Brown to conduct public worship in Queen's Park Church on an appointed Sunday, and declare to the congregation the decision of the Supreme Court. Dr. Brown accordingly, one fine summer morning, drove in from Paisley to the pleasant southern suburb of Crosshill, where was situated the sanctuary which is still known locally as "Fergus Ferguson's Church." This building is the ecclesiastical masterpiece of "Greek" Thomson, and is in the Greek style modified by Egyptian influence. It is severely classical, exquisitely proportioned, entirely self-consistent. Its rectangular austerity is at first somewhat disconcerting to eyes accustomed to Gothic arches; but its logical harmony captures the imagination; there is an æsthetic satisfaction in its strict conformity to type, as well as in the grace of its lines and the beauty of its colouring; and its acoustic qualities render it, spite of its dimensions, a perfect auditorium. As a testimony to the artistic value of this edifice we may note that Ford Maddox Brown said in 1883 that he had been greatly impressed by two things which he had seen during a visit to Glasgow: the crypt of the Cathedral and the interior of Queen's Park Church.

Such was the place of worship to which Dr. Brown now directed his way. It is said that on his arrival he asked to see the list of psalms and hymns which the organist had prepared, and that he found it to present a selection of the most exultant and triumphant songs which the books of praise contained. One of these, at least, he thought it advisable to exclude: the 124th Psalm, that famous pæan of deliverance which has for its keynote the lines:

> "If that the Lord had not our cause maintain'd;
> If that the Lord had not our right sustain'd,
> When cruel men against us furiously
> Rose up in wrath, to make of us their prey;
> Then certainly they had devour'd us all."

This is a great song, fraught with rugged power and dear to Scottish hearts; but Dr. Brown thought it, in the circumstances, somewhat open to misunderstanding. And so, perhaps, it was; yet it may be doubted whether any other hymn could be found to express so perfectly the mood of the Queen's Park people that day. However this may be, it is certain that the ambassador of the Synod discharged his delicate mission with great tact and wisdom. After reading the official declaration, he proceeded to say:

"By making these announcements I have fulfilled the letter of my appointment, but I feel it is only in harmony with the spirit of it that I should most heartily congratulate you on the happy termination of this matter. I rejoice with you that your beloved pastor is once more among you, with uncancelled commission to

speak to you of the things that concern the kingdom of God. I am sure that my testimony will be approved, not only by those who have been able to judge his utterances favourably, but by those who have been constrained by a sense of duty to condemn them, when I say that throughout this protracted trial his whole bearing has been that of a Christian gentleman and a loyal son of the Church he loves. I have ventured to characterise the issue which we have reached as a happy termination of the matter. It seems to me that it is honourable at once to the Church and to Mr. Ferguson. It is honourable to our Church which in all stages of its history has striven with varying success to combine unswerving fidelity to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith with liberty on matters which do not enter into the substance of that faith. I am not here, of course, to give any official interpretation of the decision which I have been sent to announce, but I think its obvious meaning is that the Church is resolutely determined to keep its place among the Churches of the Reformation by remaining faithful to certain cardinal doctrines ; that beyond these she is not disposed to make a man an offender for a word. She has acted in the spirit of St. Augustine—'in essentials unity ; in non-essentials liberty ; in all things charity.' And the issue which has been reached is equally honourable to your beloved pastor. He has shown no cowardice ; he has not swerved in one iota from what he deems the truth, and yet he has most willingly furnished the Synod with every explanation which was needed to make his meaning clear, and to reveal to many who had doubt about it, that which many others by independent study of his words had become convinced of—namely, his essential harmony with the doctrine of the Christian Church. In view of a settlement so honourable to both parties, I am sure I need not urge you to let every remnant of bitterness be swallowed up in the joy of

this day. Your loyalty to your pastor in the time of trial has been very beautiful. For his sake, as well as for your own, I venture to beseech you to forget all in these months of anxiety which you may feel it to be unpleasant to remember, and to go forward under his guidance to the earnest study of God's truth, to the faithful living of the Christian life, and to the doing of the work given you to do as a congregation of Christ's flock which He hath purchased with His own blood. I cannot doubt that you will find that the things which have happened to your pastor have fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel of the grace of God ; and that he will be able to comfort them that are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself hath been comforted of God."

II.

This statement by Dr. Brown is given here in full because it presents, in few words, a review of the Ferguson Prosecution, with especial reference to its result. It is of great value, too, as embodying the deliberate verdict on the whole matter of one who spoke with authority, who had borne an important part in the Case ; who had, moreover, never been a partisan on one side or the other of the controversy, but had striven to secure, in all he did, the safety and unity of his Church. His utterance, further, affords us a good deal of light as to the ecclesiastical situation which at the moment existed. In his exhortation, for instance, to set aside all bitterness, he refers to the intensity of feeling which then unquestionably prevailed, not only in Queen's Park Congregation but throughout a very

wide area. His testimony that the Defender in the trial had "not swerved in one iota from what he believed to be the truth" was undoubtedly meant as a reply to those who asserted that "the heretic" had shown a cowardly spirit and had fallen back from his position. This was a misrepresentation which had been spread abroad, mainly through the influence of a leading newspaper; and it had done incalculable mischief. The impartial and emphatic evidence to the contrary given by Dr. Brown ought to have ended this calumny forthwith; but we must record with sorrow that it had no such immediate or complete effect. He must be a swift runner and a strong man who can overtake and kill a flying slander.

Dr. Brown's claim that the "happy issue" of the Case was honourable to the United Presbyterian Church was directed against those, and they were not a few, who were of opinion that the decision of the Synod was very far from "honourable"; afforded, indeed, a glaring instance of sheer ecclesiastical opportunism. Yet, on the whole, the fair student of history must sympathise with Dr. Brown. It is true that the demeanour of the Supreme Court had not always been so dignified and lofty as that of the man on trial at its bar; but a great democratic convention cannot be expected to attain the complete self-mastery that is possible to an individual. It must be admitted also that a good deal of passion and fire was apparent at some points in the debate; but who ever heard of

religious questions being publicly discussed with sincerity and yet without emotion? It is to be granted, again, that the friends of the old theology fought with determination and with zeal; but it would hardly have been to their credit had they done otherwise. Are men to be blamed for defending with devotion a great and ancient system of belief, made precious by a thousand memories? Let it be agreed, once more, that the Synod did an amazing thing when it condemned a man for heresy, did not withdraw that condemnation, and yet refused to punish him. And let it, finally, be conceded that motives of ecclesiastical policy had a share in directing this eccentric, inconsistent line of action. Still, it remains to be said that the Christian Church throughout her entire history has never consented to be the obedient servant of logic, has always been willing to be inconsistent in form, in order thereby to be faithful in substance, has ever been ready to be called a fool if she might through folly achieve a deeper wisdom. The Synod of 1878 brought the Church in safety through an imminent peril; it granted in reality, while it refused in appearance, a measure of actual freedom and toleration such as had not been heretofore allowed in any Presbyterian Communion either in Scotland or anywhere throughout the world. It had, moreover, eased the process of change from an older to a newer state of thought without estranging the friends of tradition or proscribing the servants of progress. For these reasons, then, though

we cannot wholly defend all that the Synod did in the thronging hours of crisis, we yet must say with Dr. Brown that it achieved an end that was honourable to itself, as well as to Fergus Ferguson, and was for the ultimate advancement of truth, union, and freedom within the whole Scottish Church.

But, while all this may be said with fairness, from the purely historical standpoint, it yet cannot be claimed that the decision of the Supreme Court was one of ideal justice in its relation to the Defender in the Case. In every act which is influenced by policy and compromise something is sacrificed, either of general interest or of individual rights. In this particular instance it was the individual that suffered; for the minister of Queen's Park was left in a position both anomalous and trying. Dr. Ferguson always recognised the difficulties which had beset the Synod under the prevailing conditions of the time and the disabilities imposed by Presbyterian methods of government, but he was never really reconciled to a judgment which was alien to his habits of mind. Men of his type, though they may hold a high doctrine of Church authority, are always suspicious of ecclesiastical politics. And this temperamental antipathy had certainly been neither removed nor modified by the things which he had suffered.

This mood of dissatisfaction and unrest, which naturally possessed his mind at the close of his Trial, was a great deal accentuated, for a time, by certain

circumstances and incidents. For one thing, he disliked extremely some of the statements in the Declaratory Act which became a part of the United Presbyterian constitution in 1879. The value of this document lies in its statement that "liberty is allowed" on matters "not entering into the substance of the faith." This latter phrase is a piece of masterly vagueness almost without a rival. Although it was, as we understand, suggested by a rigid logician and Calvinist, Dr. Marshall, it is fitted to secure a very wide comprehension indeed. But the Act, as a whole, was received, on its first appearance, with no little contempt by some, especially, of the younger clergy. George Gilfillan, also, described it publicly as "that miserable document." This was, in substance, Ferguson's view. For he found in it that which he most of all disliked, the spirit of a temporising expediency which, in effect, enjoins men to hold certain opinions and yet at the same time to affirm their opposites.

The deposition of David Macrae was another severe trial of Ferguson's patience. It is true, perhaps, that Macrae was expelled from the United Presbyterian ministry because he sought, by a kind of benevolent violence, to force the Church into a position which it refused to occupy. He desired to secure a formal and explicit tolerance for all the different theories of final Destiny; and this was an enterprise which could not then hope to succeed. Also, it was an ideal which his old friend of the Dalkeith days did not at all approve.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of Macrae himself on the subject of future punishment does not appear to have differed much from that of Ferguson. He really denied only what the latter also rejected; namely, the dogma that evil in the form of sin and suffering would eternally exist. When, therefore, he was deposed, Ferguson protested against the sentence, and he, further, felt himself in honour bound to restate publicly his own position. This he accordingly did in a lecture to his people on the "Dilemma of Modern Orthodoxy." This, as the title suggests, was a very trenchant and outspoken utterance characterised by all his old subtlety, force, and passion. The main contention of it was that to affirm the everlasting duration of evil was to deny every essential element in true orthodoxy; and this contention applied not only to sin but to suffering as well. "An eternal manifestation of sin in the form of suffering necessarily implies an eternal ground of sin of which it is the manifestation. In a word, to predicate eternity of penalty is to predicate eternity of sin itself, and thus theoretically to ground it in God." "No twilight of doom will rest for ever upon any. It is God Himself who is the consuming fire: and that which He consumes is everything opposed to the truth concerning His own nature." Of course, the effect of such plain speaking was to create a certain "liveliness" in various theological regions; and the final result was that the attention of the Presbytery was formally directed to the report of Mr. Ferguson's address, and

also to a sermon of his on "Everlasting Punishment," with certain other documents.

III.

This new action was taken by a group of men whose vehemence and zeal compensated them for what they lacked in numbers and in weight. But it was, from the first, foredoomed to failure. In the year 1879 the Glasgow Presbytery had been divided, and now formed two separate Courts (North and South). It is said that the Synod, in making this division, had been mindful of the strong antagonisms which the debates of 1877–1878 had created. But however this may be, it did happen that the Southern Presbytery to which Ferguson now belonged was greatly influenced by his friends: men like Dr. Corbett, Dr. Jeffrey, and Dr. Leckie. Hence, the Court to which the opponents of the Queen's Park Minister stated their case was extremely unsympathetic in its attitude. A committee, with Dr. Leckie as Convener, was appointed to examine the documents submitted; and within no long time it reported that these papers contained nothing which had not been before the Synod during the recent prosecution; and that, therefore, it saw no reason why anything further should be done in the matter. The Presbytery accepted this finding with an eagerness born of past experience. Just as Charles the Second was resolved that he "would go no more on his travels,"

so the Presbytery was determined, at all costs, to go no more on a "heresy hunt." Moreover, when an appeal was made against the Presbytery's decision, the Synod was found to share the mood of the inferior Tribunal; a mood which might have expressed itself in the words:

> "The uses of labour are surely done . . .
> And I have had troubles enough, for one."

Dr. Duff, Professor of Church History, was Convener of a Committee which was entrusted by the Supreme Court with the investigation of the Appeal; and he proved himself more than equal to the situation. The recommendation which he submitted was, in substance, to sustain the Presbytery's decision, and dismiss the case. Of course, a rather heated little discussion arose upon this, in which Mr. Orr, Dr. James Brown, and Dr. Marshall took the leading parts; but throughout the whole of the talking Dr. Duff maintained that air of scholarly, genial, somewhat humorous calm which was characteristic of his delightful personality. He caused, indeed, some disturbance by suggesting that the Committee had no proof that certain of the documents presented to it were certainly the work of Mr. Ferguson; they "might be forgeries for all he knew." And from this position he could not be moved either by the plaintive appeals of some speakers or by the logic of Dr. Marshall. Nor were further questionings of any avail against his serene *nonchalance*. "Were

they to understand that Mr. Ferguson was at liberty to deny the eternity of evil ? " asked Dr. Marshall : Dr. Duff replied that " the Committee had not endeavoured to define what liberty Mr. Ferguson should enjoy." " Was a man to be free to teach that annihilation was the penalty of sin ? " demanded the amazed champion of the faith : Dr. Duff " was not prepared to say a word about that." " What is the use of throwing all this dust in our eyes ? " finally exclaimed the baffled Doctor : but the Professor suavely assured him that " that was not the question before them." As nothing could be made of Dr. Duff, and as the temper of the Court was plainly pacific, the attacking force presently desisted, and the whole matter was shortly thereafter brought to an end. Truly, a great change had come upon the spirit of the Synod within the space of two short years. In 1878 Ferguson had narrowly escaped deposition : in 1880 the Court dismissed with deadly serenity the complaints of his foes. Not in vain had he suffered ; not without profit had Macrae fought and fallen. The struggles of the past were justified : the Aftermath made amends for the early mowing.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

We have now completed the story of Dr. Ferguson's reforming enterprise, a story with which has been interwoven an exposition of his theology and some account of his career. It now remains to attempt a brief estimate of his achievement, and thereafter to dwell for a short space upon the record of his closing years.

I.

In order to estimate fairly the theological work of Dr. Ferguson it is necessary to remind ourselves that he was in some sense a pioneer, and that his construction of thought was eminently individual. It corresponded, as a whole, to no recognised historical type; being neither Roman nor Anglican nor Calvinistic nor Lutheran nor Arminian. At one point and another, no doubt, it was in harmony with predominant features, now of this school and now of that, but as a complete structure it was independently designed. Its doctrine, for instance, of the Divine Nature recalls the teaching of

Dorner, the great Lutheran thinker. In its account of the eternal Decrees its position was Universalist, after a fashion of its own. Its view of human nature approached the Socinian, in some respects; but its speculation as to the identity of the finite spirit with the Divine approximated to the Logos doctrine of Philo. Its conception of a correspondence between the triunity of man's personality and the Trinity of the Godhead was founded on the mystical imaginings of Boehme. In its doctrine of Justice it was essentially Platonic; while its presentation of Redemption was certainly a development of MacLeod Campbell's theory. Its identification, however, of the everlasting Priesthood of Christ with the eternal energy of God's redeeming love was a counterpart of the idea that underlies the Roman doctrine of the Mass. Roman, or at least Catholic, also, was its belief in the threefold destiny of man, and its emphasis on the idea of the Intermediate State. Its doctrine of Sin, as consisting in a perversion of the will, was Augustinian; and its view of ultimate Destiny was essentially at one with that of Origen. It thus had wide historical roots and relations, owing much to all the past of Christian reflection. Nevertheless, in its method of blending various elements into one harmonious whole, and in its manner of employing the Hegelian dialectic, it was strikingly original.

It is noticeable, as we have seen, that Ferguson's thought owed nothing to the Scottish philosophy of Reid and Hamilton which was taught when he was at

College, and was little influenced even by the traditional theology in which he had been nurtured. The former of these two facts is not perhaps very surprising; for the philosophy in question never gave any inspiration to theology, but encouraged, rather, either a dull conformity to convention or else a barren agnosticism. Neither Erskine nor Campbell nor any other adventurous Scottish intellect had found the Hamiltonian soil a fruitful one. We cannot, therefore, wonder that it did not attract Ferguson's mind; though his complete rejection of it, despite his teachers, certainly shows the independence of his spirit. It must, however, be regarded as very significant that his inherited Calvinism left so little mark upon his thinking. At no single point did his teaching correspond to that of the Genevan School. His dominant conception of God was not that of sovereign Power, but of self-bestowing, self-fulfilling Love. He attributed the origin of the Universe, not to an arbitrary act of the Divine will, but to an inner necessity of the Divine nature. His doctrine of Election did not involve the exclusion of any soul from the saving purpose of the Creator: it meant simply that God had predetermined the end of things, that He had ordained the method whereby that end should be reached, and that He used for His instruments in the fulfilment of His design those who freely offered themselves to His service. In his conception of the Atonement, again, Ferguson rejected all limited or partial views of its intention and result; he denied that Christ

endured a suffering equivalent to that which ought to have been ours; also, he repudiated the idea that the work of salvation was wholly the sovereign act of God, and insisted that man was a co-worker with the Divine in every spiritual process. The complete achievement of Christ he regarded as the triumph of the human spirit, no less than as the victory of Divine grace. It need not be added that his theory of an Eternal Sacrifice, being perpetually consummated in the heavens, was totally alien to Confessional teaching; nor that his revival of the belief in the Intermediate State of souls, wherein they experience beyond death enlightenment and education and discipline, was antagonistic to the tradition of his Church. In short, Ferguson's whole construction was anti-Calvinistic, not only in its details but in its governing principles and purpose. It made an end of all absolute oppositions, as between God and man, time and eternity, free will and necessity, justice and mercy, the grace of the Father and the moral action of His children; nay, even as between the ultimate issues of salvation and perdition. In all discords and contradictions it found the promise of harmony; whatever was at conflict with the Divine meaning and soul of the Universe it declared to be mere nothingness and vanity.

With reference to Ferguson's particular contentions, they are, of course, in some cases open to criticism, but they reveal often a singular prevision of subsequent thought, and are, indeed, not seldom in advance, not

only of opinion in his own time, but of much that is still believed to-day. For instance, his doctrine that God and man are co-agents in the work of salvation is stated in almost Fergusonian terms by one of the most learned and progressive of living theologians, Professor John Dick Fleming: "The Infinite Being transcends the finite, but also includes the finite, and that without destroying the finite's self-activity. God is in the world, and His omnipresent activity is the basis of all the activity of man in its upward movement. The 'natural man' of the older theology, who is entirely outside of God, and bereft of all good and possibility of good, is an unnatural fiction. There is no man who has not the working of God's grace within him as well as around him, and everything commendable or good in man may be assigned equally to God and to the man himself." [1]

Again, Ferguson's emphasis on the doctrine of the Intermediate State has been vindicated by later thought, and is certain to be still further vindicated in the years to come. When he declared, again, that a great deal of human sin, belonging as it does to physical conditions, must fall away like a garment at the touch of death, he was uttering with courage an obvious but forgotten truth. When, also, he maintained that the state after death must be one of mental enlightenment and development, he indicated a path of thought that requires to be further pursued. Even his most debatable

[1] *Redemption*, J. Dick Fleming, D.D., p. 105.

point of doctrine, his contention, namely, that the logical issue of evil is the dissolution of the Universe, is worthy of careful estimation. If the Universe exists for the purpose of exhibiting the Divine mind, and for the fulfilling of the Divine order, then it does seem to follow that sin, being opposed to the whole intention and end of creation, would, if permitted to complete itself, dissolve the entire system of things. Just as the principles of social anarchy would, logically developed, make an end of ordered civilisation, even so the anarchic moral principle which we call evil is in purpose and nature utterly subversive of the Cosmos as designed of God. Moreover, the Fergusonian contention that the irreparable dissolution which sin would naturally entail has been countered throughout history by the supporting grace of God, and that this sustaining and life-giving energy of the Most High has realised itself in the person and work of Jesus Christ; this is a doctrine which is altogether coherent and possesses a majesty worthy of its theme. If it be true that in the Redeemer humanity "came to itself again," and that in Him also God destroyed and brought to nothingness the iniquity of the world, then it is evident that a universal doom has been utterly done away, and that there is an actual and vital sense in which our Lord can be described as the Saviour of all mankind.

We, therefore, do not in the least hesitate to claim that Dr. Ferguson was a theologian whose quality has never been fairly recognised, and a pioneer whose

work has not received its fitting honour. It is the simple historical truth to say that in him the spiritual philosophy was first brought to bear upon the traditional theology of Scotland in the whole range of Christian belief. Before his time, of course, many individuals within the Presbyterian Churches had felt the modifying influence of that philosophy; and some had applied it to particular doctrines, notably that of the Atonement. But no one of Ferguson's predecessors had challenged the Calvinistic construction in all its extent on metaphysical grounds, or had sought to present a complete alternative to that construction, or had made the gallant effort which he made to prepare the minds of men for the conflict that must shortly come. It is to the lasting credit of his name that he foresaw, while still a youth, a time when the newer methods of thought must invade the Scottish Communions with irresistible power; and that he, standing alone, endeavoured by open constitutional action to persuade his Church of its danger and of the need to set its house in order against the evil day. His effort was a bold one, and far-seeing and unselfish; it was "an attempt religious and an attempt conservative"; it was an endeavour to remove betimes the things that were shaken that the things which could not be shaken might remain.

In any case, the questions which Ferguson raised have still to be answered. The subject of Creed Revision, for instance, is a living issue at this hour, whose settlement does not brook delay. It is still necessary,

also, to ask what we mean by such doctrines as that of the Trinity; how we relate the ministry of Christ to the entirety of the Divine working; what the penalty was which the Saviour removed from the human race; what the belief of the Church really is as to immortality, the state of souls beyond death, and the ultimate destinies of the world.

II.

A certain glamour attached itself to the personality of Dr. Ferguson in the minds of many young people who belonged to the Glasgow Churches at the time when the present writer was a student. This was due in part no doubt to our knowledge of the great battle he had fought in the cause of religious progress; for a man who has led a gallant adventure is always an attractive figure for those who "hear their days before them and the tumult of their life." But in the main, Ferguson's peculiar influence was sustained by sheer power of personality. The singular charm of his bearing, character, and address is testified by all who remember him. It was unique in its kind, indefinable, elusive. Like "the tender grace of a day that is dead," it cannot be made evident to any who never experienced it. To these latter, indeed, any adequate attempt to describe it would, almost of necessity, seem exaggerated in its terms. Nevertheless, it was what it was; and for us who felt its spell, it remains as unquestionable and unchanging as are, in recollection, the familiar

scenes and events of our early days. Professor James Orr, a man not easily influenced, once said to me: "I have known many eminent men in my day; but only a few who could rightly be called men of genius, and among these few Fergus Ferguson was not the least." This is a verdict that stands secure, receiving the assent, even to-day, of all who worthily remember the man.[1]

In preceding pages of this book some account has been given of his general appearance and characteristics; and that account applies to him in the main, not only as he was during his earlier ministry, but as he was known to those of my own generation. It cannot be said, of course, that he showed no marks in the evening of his life of the conflicts through which he had passed. It was, indeed, impossible that a sensitive spirit like his should endure what he had endured and be utterly unscathed thereby. For instance, there was noticeable in him an unwillingness to express himself with freedom except in society where he felt assured of sympathy. When that condition was not fulfilled, he was courteous, indeed, but somewhat reticent. It is further to be said that his system of doctrine had become rather severely defined under the pressure of controversy; and this seemed to many

[1] The width of Ferguson's influence upon the minds of generous Scottish youths is illustrated by a public utterance of Dr. Wallace Williamson, in 1917: "That singularly beautiful and powerful Christian preacher, Dr. Fergus Ferguson, by whom, like other students, I was greatly influenced years ago when a student in the University of Edinburgh."

to lessen his freedom and to limit his intellectual sympathy. On this point, however, we may recall a suggestive comment of his own, which reveals incidentally how well aware he was of current opinion: "People say that to possess a definite system of belief is to be deprived of one's liberty. But this is true only when the system is imposed upon a man from without. When it is the creation of his own mind, or when he has made it his own by cordial inward assent, it is so far from being a bondage that it constitutes the only perfect freedom." It is to be admitted, however, that his absorption during later years in purely philosophical interests did narrow a good deal the extent of his reading. In truth he habitually refrained, for a long time, from the perusal of general literature. On one occasion, it was represented to him that it would be well for him to refresh his mind by a little study of fiction, and he yielded a somewhat unwilling assent. But the book that was placed in his hands was unfortunately selected, being Meredith's *The Egoist*; and he returned it after a short trial with the remark: "If this is light literature, I would rather read Hegel." Fortunately, Dr. Ferguson's mind was already stored with the fruits of his early devotion to the best works of the English genius.

But, apart from all this, it is certain that unsympathetic people failed altogether to estimate the width and variety of Dr. Ferguson's sympathies. Laborious student and thinker as he was, he was yet

at home in the world of men, and knew it very well. He contemplated the human comedy with a tolerant, genial, but penetrating regard; and some of his brethren would have been very much surprised had they learned how shrewdly he appraised them. Referring, for example, to a clergyman who had lately spoken in the Synod, he said: "So-and-so is an able man, but there is a certain want of emancipation at the root of his being": a judgment altogether just. Those, further, who supposed him to be incapable of appreciating an attitude of mind with which he was not in agreement forgot that he had a strong sense of humour, and that this endowment always involves the power of detached criticism even of one's self and one's beliefs. In his later years, for example, he was a strong supporter of the Local Veto propaganda; nevertheless, he once read to me with gleeful appreciation the lines in which a Scottish lawyer describes the Permissive Bill as

> "... a little bill that's being produced incog,
> To permit you to prevent me from having my glass of grog."

A typical though somewhat pathetic example of this power of humorous detachment is afforded by a saying of his to his son James when he lay prostrate in his last illness: "You see, I have to be a philosopher now. I am reduced to the categories of space and time."

Dr. Ferguson's last appearance in the arena of theological debate took place, as we have seen, in 1880. At that time there still lay before him twenty-five years

of active ministerial life; but these were on the whole years of peace, devoted to his pulpit, to the cares of a great pastorate, and to the prosecution of philosophical study and research. It is true that to the end he continued to be Fergus Ferguson; and this meant occasional incursions into the controversial sphere. He made, for instance, an impassioned attack on Mr. Gladstone's policy, when that statesman released members of Parliament from their obligation to take the oath of allegiance in the name of Almighty God. He regarded belief in the Supreme Being as the foundation of all social order; and the admission of atheists into the Legislature seemed to him to involve a principle destructive of Christian civilisation. In like manner, he periodically delivered from his pulpit strong criticisms of theoretic Voluntaryism. On this point he had been opposed throughout his entire ministry to the prevailing sentiment of his Church, which favoured Disestablishment; for, of course, his philosophy was altogether hostile to that severe distinction between the secular and the religious aspects of the national life on which the Voluntary position rested. Nor did his convictions as to this subject decrease in strength as the years went by. Indeed, his last address to the Synod, in 1891, was concerned with the matter; for in that year he was the spokesman of a powerful party among the Glasgow laymen which sought to discourage the political activities of the Disestablishment Committee. Of course his deliverances on this question

were quite unacceptable to a number of his own people ; but then, this preacher's influence over his congregation was never due in the least to any effort on his part to secure the general applause of his audience.

Apart from these things, however, the tenor of Dr. Ferguson's later ministry was a tranquil one. Indeed, it must not be supposed that the main interest of his life had ever been controversial. In this regard, our narrative, being concerned of necessity with the fighting aspects of his career, may have tended to give a wrong impression of the man and his work. The prevailing atmosphere of his mind was one of quiet devoutness and meditation, and he was ever faithful and tender in the discharge of pastoral duty. He was fortunate also in his family ; and his devoted wife protected him to the uttermost from the friction of the world and the undue intrusion of petty cares. Of this lady, her son, the Rev. James Ferguson, writes : " She was always a most sagacious woman, with a shrewd and lively wit that often helped her and her family over many domestic difficulties. Her self-effacement was balanced by a quiet determination and strength of character that served to restrain her husband's occasionally great impetuosity. She had a simple and deep natural piety, very uneffusive, but very strong and practical. My father constantly sought her counsel, not only on the lesser matters that cropped up in the course of his daily ministry, but on the great themes, theological and metaphysical, with which he was ceaselessly occupied."

Dr. Ferguson's preaching rarely concerned itself directly with public questions or passing events. Its constant theme was the gospel of God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ; and, being continually enriched by private study and meditation, it exhibited a singularly wide range and variety of religious interpretation. It was sometimes severely metaphysical, sometimes mystical, sometimes imaginative and poetic. Often it was fervently evangelic, and often also it dealt with simple matters of practical duty. One of his people, Sir William Lorimer, said to me that "Ferguson could preach with equal power any kind of sermon." In the earlier period of his career it was his habit to speak without the aid of notes, and it is probable that this method of preaching was most in accord with his natural gifts. Sir William Robertson Nicoll in a private letter to the writer gives a vivid account of the impression Ferguson made in the use of extempore speech: "I went to hear Fergus Ferguson preach once when I was a student at Aberdeen; and I have never forgotten the attraction of his personality and the grace of his style, as shown in that service. His subject was Prayer; our reasons for believing in its efficacy. The short introduction to this sermon was read from manuscript; but he presently put his paper aside and spoke directly to the people with the most winning power. I remember saying to myself as I went out of the church, 'That is the way to preach.'"

This testimony of Sir William's is in itself authori-

tative, and it is in harmony with the witness of those who remember this preacher in the period of his greatest power. Dr. Woodside, for example, remarks of him that "at his best he spoke like a man inspired." [1] It is true that Dr. Ferguson never had a high opinion of his own extempore sermons. He said to me, for instance, on one occasion: "I wonder that they ever called me to Queen's Park; for at that time I spoke without paper, and it must often have been very poor stuff." But a man is not always the best judge of his own powers; and there can be little doubt that while his written discourse was in a high degree effective and lent itself to the accurate expression of his thought, it yet hindered somewhat the full exercise of his varied gifts; it restrained to some extent his emotional freedom, and curbed those moods of burning eloquence which were characteristic of his temperament. However this may be, he certainly came to adopt more and more as time went on the habit of reading from a manuscript; and this was his method during the years which come within my own memory.

His style of oratory during this later period was as a rule calm and deliberate; but his elocution was redeemed from monotony by the beauty of his voice and by its rich variety of inflection. Sometimes also he would leave his manuscript, and bring to bear upon his audience the full force of a dynamic personality. His sermons generally contained a great deal of close reason-

[1] *Soul of a Scottish Church*, p. 271.

ing, and he did not hesitate to tax to the utmost, and even beyond it, the intelligence of his hearers; but there occurred from time to time, even in his most difficult discussions, utterances of extraordinary beauty and spiritual appeal. A great deal is said at present about the necessity of being "simple" in speaking from the pulpit; but the metaphysical quality of Ferguson's sermons seemed to agree well with the spiritual needs of his congregation, for it was ever devout in its worship and abundant in good works. Also, until the end of his ministry, the Church was always full when "the Doctor" preached.

When last I heard him, in 1897, his strength had considerably declined, but his discourse had lost none of its ancient charm. The text was one that was often on his lips, "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God," and in some passages wherein he spoke of the blessedness of the Most High he exercised upon his audience the true Fergusonian spell. His thought in these passages attained heights of great mystical elevation; and the whole personality of the man, the expression of his face and the tones of his voice, harmonised with his theme. In the hush which fell upon the congregation one discerned a sense of almost awe, as of those who felt themselves in the presence of a power not fully understood which brought them within the shadow of the eternal.

It was my singular privilege to be assistant to Dr. Ferguson in 1891–1892; and the memories of that experience remain as a permanent treasure. At that

time he had been ill, and was for a while entirely divorced from work. But his temper of mind was calm and serene; and his treatment of one just beginning the ministry was wholly magnanimous and forbearing. There was unfailing warmth in his welcome, and unceasing wisdom in his counsel, and the utmost generosity in his judgment. But especially to be cherished are the recollections of the many long walks in which I was his companion. The environment of these walks was not perhaps ideal, for we passed along the outskirts of the great city in an atmosphere often dusky and dim; and as the winter evenings darkened, "the glare of the flaming furnace" shone red over tracts of desolate land. But Dr. Ferguson seemed wholly indifferent to his surroundings, being absorbed in other concerns. As we trudged along, it needed but an occasional suggestion to maintain the flow of his conversation. He expressed with a generous freedom, in such hours, the thoughts that occupied his mind. Very little had he to say about the past of his adventurous career, or even about purely theological subjects. His engrossing theme was the speculative construction on which he was constantly engaged; and in listening to him one felt how amazing was the grasp of his intellect, and how wonderful the ease with which he moved on the higher levels of thought. Youths who had experienced the influence of Edward Caird were not easily impressed by the metaphysical genius of other men than he, but to have heard Ferguson's

monologue without discerning in it an intellect of astonishing grip and range would have been to prove one's self deaf and blind. I have often regretted taking no notes of these conversations; but at that time we had the confident hope that his great philosophical work would ere long be completed and given to the world. Alas, that this hope, which was the inspiration of his life, should have been thwarted and brought to nothing by the pressure of crowding duties, the rigorous requirements of his own intellectual honour, and the failure of physical powers that had been taxed beyond endurance by ceaseless labours, the stringencies of debate, and the strong excitements of a chivalrous adventure.

After his illness in 1891 Dr. Ferguson's strength gradually declined. But he remained in charge of Queen's Park Church till 1905. The spirit in which he continued to labour and the mental attitude which characterised him to the end are well illustrated in the following verses written by him while on a holiday during one of the later summers of his life:

RESTING BY THE SEA.

Rest, rest, deep and calm,
  Rest by the restless sea,
By the rocking wave and the breathing balm,
  And the soft, low lullaby.
Sleep, sleep, calm and deep,
  Deep as the dreamless sea,
That the soul may lave and the senses steep
  In silence and mystery.

Peace, peace, heart and brain:
  Nothing at all to do
But the sigh to list of the heaving main
  And the shifting clouds to view.
Hush, hush, silence sweet:
  Nothing at all to say;
No sermon to make, no critic to meet,
  No gossip to hear to-day.

Room, room, space and time;
  Time for the heart's quick fear
With the stately rhyme of the whole to chime,
  And the filmy eye to clear.
Clear, clear, pure and fair;
  White as the keen full moon,
All cleansed from the soil of the tawny air,
  Aglow in the stellar noon.

Free, free, light and gay,
  Free as the careless wind;
As a joyous thing just to float away,
  And the proud world leave behind.
Float, float, broad and bright;
  Space for the soul to spread,
To mingle and merge with depth and with height,
  The infinite overhead.

Far, far, like a star,
  Out in the vast abyss,
From the worry and care and heartless war
  Of a world we do not miss.
Out, out, clear and cool,
  Quit of the din and glare,
The strut of the fop, the stare of the fool,
  The sick and encumbered air.

Round, round, down and up,
  Nadir and verge and pole;
All delights to quaff in one glorious cup
  To the health of body and soul.
Quaff, quaff, deep and long:
  Nature as one wide bowl
O'erflows with the essence subtle and strong,
  That binds the whole in a whole.

Whole, whole, healing word!
  Heaven and earth are one
With the triune Lord, and in sweet accord,
  From a dewdrop to the sun.
Peace, peace, panting heart!
  Now you have reached the goal,
The end of the world, the use of the part,
  To lose itself in the whole.

Then, then, back again,
  Back to the home and hall,
To the daily task and the world of men,
  And the rousing trumpet-call.
Strong, strong, full of cheer,
  Full of the Spirit's power;
A true holiday to drive away fear,
  And nerve for the darkest hour.

On Dr. Ferguson's retiral from active service he, most fittingly, received for his colleague and successor, Dr. J. Robertson Cameron, whose father, as we have seen, was one of the ablest speakers for the Defence during the great Trial of 1877–1878. Dr. Cameron, in turn, was succeeded by the Rev. J. Golder Burns, B.D., under whose able pastorate Queen's Park Church continues to prosper. Concerning the evening-time of Dr. Ferguson's strenuous life the following account is given by Dr. Joshua Ferguson, Paisley, the eldest son of our theologian, and one of truly kindred mind:

"On his retirement from the ministry in 1905, he made his home at West Kilbride, where the closing years of his life were spent. Besides the other reasons that led to this retirement there was one that had always lain very near his heart—the hope that he might be able to complete the philosophical work upon which he had for many years engaged himself. He hailed

with almost boyish eagerness the prospect of hitherto unattainable freedom from other duties, and of the busy leisure that was to bring his *magnum opus* into being. This hope and purpose were never realised. There had been many beginnings of this book in the past, and just as many revisions and recastings. He was ever searching for the perfect word and the mathematically convincing argument; and in these phases of autocriticism his 'scheme of things entire' was many a time remoulded in the effort towards an unachievable Finality.

"At first in his new home he was content and happy. He rejoiced in the quiet countryside, and his poet's love for sea and hill and sunset revived anew. He read more widely than had been possible for a long time. He took pleasure in the visits and talks of old friends and of the scattered members of his family. But gradually the symptoms of a nervous malady which had cast their first shadows during the tempests and strains of his ecclesiastical conflicts became more apparent and disturbing. His interests narrowed, and there grew a deepening abstraction from all worldly affairs. To those who knew him, it was painfully evident that his powers were waning and the brightness of his intellect becoming dim. But the ruling passion still was strong. Conscious of growing weakness, he strove the more earnestly to finish his work. His grace before meat would at times extend itself into a spoken prayer that the food of which he was to partake might strengthen him for the task that was still unfulfilled.

"To many of the aged, as the fire of life sinks and the continuity of thought and feeling ceases, there come in the last days strange visions of the past; the ghosts of youth, the sights and scents and ploys of childhood, seem to live again in a tenuous but happy memory. But his eventide brought him no rest. Like that of the Grammarian, 'with the throttling hands of

death at strife,' his unquenchable spirit wrestled for expression. Almost his last conscious act was to dictate—as how many times before!—the title of his unborn book: *God and the Universe, or the Alphabet of Thought.* A few days later he fell into his last sleep; and he died on the 16th day of October 1911."

In this impressive story of these last days there is much of pathos, something almost of tragedy, not a little of the wistful regret that attends the frustration of lofty efforts and the blighting of cherished endeavours. Yet there is also in the record of these closing months the sublimity that belongs to the struggle of the eternal soul with the inexorable laws of our mortality; there is courage undaunted, a spirit undismayed, "and man's unconquerable mind." "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour." The only ultimate loss is the loss of faith; the only real failure is to bid farewell to hope. The abiding triumph is that which never can be gained; the enduring victory is that which cannot be achieved; and the incorruptible treasure is for ever hid in God. We can discern, therefore, in the life of Fergus Ferguson nothing that was futile, nothing that was wasted, nothing that was vain. From early morning to the fall of night he rode with Galahad on the shining quest that has no allurement except for noble minds. His days were begun in labour, continued in battle and sacrifice, and ended after fourscore years with will unshaken and with the eyes of the spirit yet undimmed. It was not, indeed, given him to achieve some of the things for

which he strove; and it was perhaps without complete success that he sought till the last to establish a perfect harmony between the evangelical beliefs that were dear to his heart and the philosophy which possessed his mind. Nevertheless, he is to be numbered among those who in every time have made the great endeavour, and have staked their all on the adventure of thought which is also the venture of faith. He beheld the vision of a religion entirely reconciled with knowledge and with reason; he saw this vision, and by an austere and toilsome way he followed it, "and did not dream it was a dream." Hence it is that his memory is to us a thing of beauty and of power. Hence, also, it is that we owe to him, more even than to others of wider renown, such measure of emancipation and theological fruitfulness as has been found in later Scottish thought: and his demand that the Church should reconcile its conscience with its creed, and that the individual religious thinker should meet the ultimate questions unafraid, is a demand that remains to the present age an inspiration and a challenge.

APPENDIX.

THE LIBEL IN BRIEF

(omitting, that is, many citations from Scripture and from Ferguson's writings).

Rev. Fergus Ferguson, minister of the United Presbyterian Church, Queen's Park, Crosshill, Glasgow, under the inspection of the Glasgow Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, you are indicted and accused this Twenty-first day of March, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-eight years, at the instance of Rev. James Black, D.D., minister of the United Presbyterian Congregation of Wellington Street, Glasgow, and Rev. James Buchanan, minister of the United Presbyterian Congregation, Greyfriars, Glasgow, appointed by the said Presbytery to prosecute in this case of libel.

Whereas, the holding and promulgating of false and unsound doctrine, contrary to the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Subordinate Standards, the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, by a minister of the United Presbyterian Church, is, by the said Word of God, and the laws and discipline of the said Church, a heinous offence, and severely punishable :

And more particularly—

First.—Whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God, and of the Subordinate Standards :—That Christ, by His obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice when He offered Himself unto God as a sacrifice for sin, securing thereby deliverance from death, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, which is the penalty of sin ; reconciliation to God ; and an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of God for all those whom His Father had given Him : And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error :—That Christ in His obedience and death did satisfy God's justice, as that which requires a surrender of the human will to the Divine, on the ground of which all men are delivered from the penalty of sin as the annihilation of the creature, and ultimately from death to the body and darkness to the soul ; and that He still continues to satisfy that justice, as in Him believers receive the gift of the Spirit, which means their deliverance from the power of sin, as the loss of the higher life of the soul.

And, more especially, according to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages :—Isaiah liii. 4—" Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted ; " verse 5—" But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." 2 Corinthians v. 2—" For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him," etc.

As, also, according to what is set forth in the Subordinate Standards concerning this doctrine, and, without prejudice to this generality, to what is declared in the Confession of Faith, Chapter VIII., Section 5 :—" The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice

of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him."

As, also, in Chapter II., Section 3, First Clause, "Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those who are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf."

Secondly.—And, whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God, and of the Subordinate Standards :—That justification is the pardon of sin and the acceptance of sinners by God, as righteous in His sight, but only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to them and received by faith alone, and not for anything wrought in them, but only for Christ's sake—not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them ; that the righteousness of Christ, which is received by faith, is that of His perfect obedience and full satisfaction imputed to them : and that faith is that saving grace which receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness alone, for pardon and acceptance with God : And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error ;—That to be justified is to occupy a just position in regard to God ;—that we occupy such a position when we are at one with God in the spirit and purpose of our lives ;—that the righteousness of Christ is conformity to the will of God, as wrought out in and through the being of man ;—that the one ground of acceptance in the sight of God, throughout all time, and under every dispensation, is necessarily determined by the being of man, and consists in conformity to the will of God, as expressed in and through that being ;—that faith in Christ is the rational conviction wrought in us by the Word

of God; that Christ is the Son of God, and, therefore, the revealer of the Divine purpose, and faith is, further, that fidelity to conviction which is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, the fruit of which is a holy life; and that the relation of faith to righteousness is, that faith is the footing on which alone we can be brought into conformity to the will of God.

And, more especially, according to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages:—Romans iii. 24—"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." 2 Corinthians v. 19—"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," etc.

Thirdly.—Whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God, and the Subordinate Standards:—That God made known His will to Adam as a covenant (commonly called the Covenant of Works), by the breach of which all men descending from him by ordinary generation were brought into an estate of sin and misery—as also that God made a covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ (commonly called the Covenant of Grace), whereby His grace is manifested, in that by the Gospel He offers Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour freely to sinners, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and whereby the salvation of His people is infallibly secured; and that the moral law summarily comprehended in the ten commandments as a declaration of the will of God to men, is, in its nature, distinct from the Gospel, which reveals the Grace of God, and offers life and salvation through a Saviour to sinners who have failed to give obedience to the law; and is for ever binding on all men as a rule of life: And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error—That God has only one covenant with man, which may thus be expressed—"Be true to thyself and thou art true to

God;" and that the grace of God is manifested, not under one covenant as distinguished from another, but in all that God does—that God's one eternal covenant with man is that which He makes with him in the very constitution of human being, in virtue of which man is able to understand the reason and end of his own existence, and freely to give himself to the realisation of that end; able, that is, to think correctly, to act accordingly, and so be blessed;—and that as law is the will of God expressed in a definite form in relation to men, and as it is altogether a gracious thing on the part of God so to express His will, it is, as the expression of our duty to love God and man, identical with the Gospel and enduring as the same.

And, more especially, according to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages:—Genesis ii. 16 and 17—"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Romans v. 12—"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," etc.

As, also, according to what is set forth in the Subordinate Standards in regard to this doctrine, and, without prejudice to this generality, to what is declared in the Confession of Faith, Chapter VII., Sections 2 and 3—"The first covenant made with man was a Covenant of Works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby (wherein) He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and

promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."

And, also, in Chapter XIX., Section 5—"The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard to the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."

Fourthly.—Also, whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God and of the Subordinate Standards :—That man, by his fall, hath lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation, so as not to be able to convert himself, and is only enabled by grace to will and to do that which is spiritually good when God converts him by His Word and Spirit, and translates him into a state of grace, freeing him from his bondage under sin : And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error :—That man, by his fall, has not lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation.

And, more especially, according to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages :— Romans viii. 7 : "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Ephesians ii. 1 : "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ; " verse 5, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)," etc.

As, also, according to what is set forth in the Subordinate Standards in regard to this doctrine, and, without prejudice to this generality, to what is declared in the Confession of Faith, Chapter IX., Section 3, and part of Section 4—"Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual

good accompanying salvation; so, as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself or prepare himself thereunto. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by His grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good."

Fifthly.—Also, whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God and of the Subordinate Standards:—That every sin, being a transgression of the law of God, and contrary thereto, doth in its own nature bring guilt and condemnation upon the sinner, and make him subject to the penalty of death; that this death is not the annihilation of man as a creature, whose soul possesses an immortal subsistence, but the punishment of him as a sinner, on account of guilt; and that guilt is only removed in this world, where salvation through Christ is freely offered to sinners, in virtue of His redemption certainly applied and effectually communicated to all those who are in time, by the Holy Spirit, enabled to believe in Him according to the Gospel, as also to others incapable of being called outwardly by the ministry of the Word: And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error: That in view of Christ's death, there is not now any other ground of human condemnation in the sight of God than unbelief in Christ; that before the final judgment all men will have judged themselves in the light of Christ into which they are brought in the intermediate state to the extent of seeing that every sin they committed, whether in heathen or in Christian lands, was virtually an act of unbelief in Him, being infidelity to the truth of God in their own being; and that as God hath decreed to save every one who accepts Christ as his Saviour, that implies that every one will have an opportunity of doing so, if not in this world, then in the world to come.

And, more especially, according to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages: 1 John iii. 4—"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Romans v. 13—"For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law," etc.

And, also, according to what is set forth in the Subordinate Standards concerning this doctrine, and, without prejudice to this generality, to what is declared in the Confession of Faith, Chapter VI., Section 6—"Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries, spiritual, temporal and eternal;" also, Chapter XXXII., Section 1—"The bodies of men, after death, return to dust and see corruption, but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies—and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies the Scripture acknowledgeth none." As also in the Larger Catechism, answer to Question 59—"Redemption is certainly applied and effectually communicated to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it, who are in time, by the Holy Ghost, enabled to believe in Christ according to the Gospel."

Sixthly.—And, whereas, it is the doctrine of the Word of God and of the Subordinate Standards:—That the wicked who die in unbelief, impenitence, and sin, are

finally cast out from the favourable presence of God and the glorious fellowship with Christ, His saints, and all holy angels, into hell—a place of eternal punishment: And, whereas, it is contrary to the same, and an error:—That the ultimate distinction in human destiny is that between a servant and a son—that the loss of sonship in relation to God is the loss of the soul's highest and proper life, but it does not follow from that that it is therefore the loss of a tolerable and useful existence, or that it consigns men to a form of existence that is in itself an eternal curse—that on the part of those who have died in unbelief, there will be only everlasting banishment from the more immediate presence of Christ and the privileges of His kingdom—and that the penalty of sin, as active suffering, cannot be eternal.

And more especially, to what is declared in the Word of God in the following and other passages: Romans ii. 5—"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" verse 8—"But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath;" verse 9—"Tribulation and anguish upon every man that doeth evil," etc.

As, also, according to what is set forth in the Subordinate Standards in regard to this doctrine, and, without prejudice to this generality, to what is declared in the Confession, Chapter XXXIII., part of Section 2: "For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

Yet true it is and of verity, that you, the said Rev.

Fergus Ferguson, have promulgated the aforesaid errors, and have avowed the same, in so far as you have uttered or issued the afternamed speech or publications—(1) A speech spoken in Presbytery on the 10th day of April 1877, which was published in a pamphlet in one or other of the months of the said year, entitled, "Reconstruction of the Creed, Speeches, and Strictures in connection with a motion recently introduced into the Glasgow Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, anent a modification of the Subordinate Standards," by the Rev. Fergus Ferguson, Queen's Park United Presbyterian Church, Crosshill: John S. Marr & Sons, 194 Buchanan Street, Glasgow, 1877;" as also (2) a pamphlet laid on the table of Presbytery, on February 12th, 1878, and published by you on January or February, 1878, entitled, "Additional Statements in defence of my doctrinal position, and in vindication of my plea for doctrinal reform, with correspondence anent further conference on the subject, by Rev. Fergus Ferguson, Crosshill, Glasgow. Glasgow: printed by Alexander Macdougall, Mitchell Street, 1878," with note marked A, entitled "The Destiny of the Wicked;" (3) a statement made by you before the Presbytery, on September 11th, 1877, in answer to questions adopted by the Presbytery for the use of members, entitled, "Mr. Ferguson's Statement in Answer;" (4) article bearing your name, and entitled, "Dr. Mackay's 'Grace and Truth'—Analytical Survey," published in the *Young Men's Christian Magazine* of March 1877; as also, and (5) article bearing your name, and entitled, "Dr. Mackay's 'Grace and Truth': rejoinder by Rev. Fergus Ferguson," published in the *Young Men's Christian Magazine* of August 1877, in which speech or publications, etc.,

And more particularly, and without prejudice to the said generality:.....(Here follow quotations from the above-mentioned documents.)

ALL WHICH, or part thereof, being found proven by the Rev. the Glasgow Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, before whom your case is to be heard, it OUGHT to be found and declared that you are deserving of censure; and censure OUGHT to be inflicted on you, according to the law of the Church, for your correction and edification, and to deter others from lapsing into similar heresies.

(Signed) JAMES BLACK.
JAMES BUCHANAN.

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